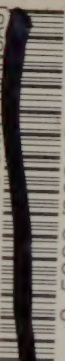


Gibbeted Gods



Lillian
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GIBBETED GODS



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"It is *not* that," Charlotte repeated wearily

GIBBETED GODS

WITHDRAWN

BY

LILLIAN BARRETT

AUTHOR OF "THE SINISTER REVEL," ETC.

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TO MY SISTER
ANITA BRIENNE

PART I

The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge,—Ezek. 18:2.

GIBBETED GODS

PART I

CHAPTER I

CHARLOTTE breathed a deep sigh as she settled into her upholstered corner and gave herself up to the luxurious enjoyment of her religion. The old colonial church, dimmed to twilight softness, filled her with a pleasing melancholy. The low tones of the choir vibrated with an exquisite sweetness that saddened her. Charlotte liked being sad and melancholy and thoughtful and tired. She had decided that was the way the religious chosen, as the Bible called them, should feel, especially on Sundays. Her glance strayed to Miss Seymour, her Sunday-school teacher, in the opposite pew. Charlotte thought Miss Seymour very beautiful as she sat there with her face lifted to the pulpit. She adored Miss Seymour, who had been so kind and patient in explaining to her things she did not understand. Charlotte had never been inside a church or a Sunday-school till that winter, a fact Miss Seymour made allowance for. Not so the children, however! They had displayed a most surprising

gaucherie (Charlotte's own word) and giggled and poked one another at her most trifling mistake. They were very crude indeed; badly dressed, too; so Charlotte had proceeded to snub them at once.

It was, then, the desire to get the best of her fellow pupils, as well as the wish to please Miss Seymour, that had sustained Charlotte in her winter's work. She had studied hard, and, with the advantage of an unusual intelligence, had soon outstripped the others in real understanding of her subject. She had a brain and knew how to use it. She was able, moreover, to express herself in most extraordinary terms—terms, it must be admitted, more continental than orthodox. Her career in the little Sunday-school had been of a meteoric brilliance, and no one appreciated that fact any more than did Charlotte herself. It was of her triumphs, then, Charlotte was thinking as her eyes studied appreciatively Miss Seymour's fine profile. She was grateful to Miss Seymour for her pleasant experiences; she was grateful also to Mr. Paisley, the rector. It *was* odd that Mr. Paisley should have taken it into his head to call and suggest her joining the Sunday-school. Yet how fortunate; for the winter would have been a lonely one, otherwise, with her mother and Philip and Cousin Hendy all in Monte Carlo! She did n't mind Philip's being away, but she had missed Paddy and Hendy so.

At this point in her reflections Charlotte noticed that Miss Seymour sighed and closed her eyes. So Charlotte moved a little, sighed, and closed *her* eyes. Peace and quiet; the music lost in the subdued hush of twilight shadows! Again she felt strangely sad and tremulous and wished vaguely that Hendy were there with her. She imagined Hendy would like church, too.

Then she opened her eyes to the colored window over the old altar. "I am the resurrection, and the life." Her lips moved as she spelled it out. She was still not quite sure what resurrection meant, but it did n't matter. She loved that window. As the afternoon sun slanted through it, mellowing its colors to a golden haze, the face of the Christ seemed strangely real, strangely tender; Charlotte felt the tears welling to her eyes. She glanced furtively at Suzanne, fairly consistent, for a French maid, in keeping her eyes closed during most of the service. Charlotte dabbed her handkerchief to her face. She was, doubtless, being what Paddy called "emotional." Paddy had said once it was middle-class to be emotional, but Charlotte always enjoyed it. It filled her with a sense of importance. Her manipulation of her dainty mouchoir grew less restrained as she wondered if Miss Seymour had noticed her.

There was a faint stir among the congregation. The music had died away entirely now. Charlotte

sat erect as she realized Mr. Paisley was mounting the stairs of the pulpit. How handsome and slender he was! How graceful as he leaned over the reading-stand! Charlotte liked men to be handsome and graceful and slender. There was an intense earnestness in his voice as he began to speak:

“The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge—”

Charlotte sat very still, listening intently. She was not old enough to follow the definite application of the sermon, but so singularly sensitive to impression was her mind, so over-developed by queer worldly contacts, that it grasped with startling accuracy the poignant message underlying the surface discussion. Evil—that vague, terrifying something behind the bright energy of life—at last took definite shape. Evil was wrong done to others; evil was injustice. An infinite relief pervaded her childish soul. The sickening mystery that had haunted her ever since she was old enough to think at all was of a sudden dispelled. Right and wrong were resolved into a simple matter of rule, like long-division and fractions. Evil was wrong done to others. By the light of this new interpretation she realized with a certain sad satisfaction that her judgment of her father had been correct. He was evil. She had seen him but three times that she could recall. He had been indifferently kind, but

she had disliked him intensely. Yes, she knew now, her father was evil, for he had wronged Paddy. How, she did not know, but her conviction was no less strong for the vagueness of her proof. In her childish mind her father's defection loomed the greater crime for the impossible perfections she attributed to her mother. Paddy was absolute; Paddy was supreme. She adored Paddy madly with the unswerving devotion only a child can give. Yet there was a peculiar baffled quality in that devotion, for she did not, could not understand Paddy. She was often very unhappy in Paddy's presence; even the thought of her at times evoked a perplexed sadness. So now; as she sat there the tears came and splashed down her cheeks. Yes, she was emotional; there seemed no longer any doubt of that.

She sat perfectly still. Mr. Paisley ceased; the choir began a soft anthem. Then suddenly Charlotte's sadness became dispelled and a strange exaltation seized her, blurred vaguely with the resolve that *she* would always be good. Gentle strains of music floated across her consciousness like wisps of cloud across a summer sky. She smiled to herself happily. Her resolve became to her mind symbolic, as it were, of the birth of a higher self and gave her even, in her own imagination, a certain ideal beauty. She felt just as the apostles must

have felt at Pentecost when the Holy Ghost descended upon them. Her sense of importance was equaled only by her sense of responsibility. The high point of the afternoon's experience was the benediction, the dramatic tensivity of which Charlotte had never before quite grasped. A second's pause, just long enough for a passionate little prayer of thanks for the light that had been sent her, and then everything was all over. But how supremely happy she felt!—happy in the music and the mellow light of the old church, happy in her adoration of Miss Seymour and Mr. Paisley, happy in the Christ of the window, happy in her belief in God and faith in her own righteousness.

She left the church with glowing eyes. Mr. Paisley was at the door and shook hands with her. Amenities were in order.

"Your mother is back?" he questioned kindly.

"Yes," answered Charlotte. She hesitated imperceptibly, weighing in her mind the advisability of tendering an invitation to tea. Then, thinking better of it, she looked him full in the eyes with a smile of piercing sweetness. It was exactly the sort of smile she had seen Paddy achieve a dozen times to cover an awkward situation. Charlotte had the pleasing sense that she herself did it very well. Then she passed on.

Miss Seymour walked almost all the way home

with her. They talked in low voices of the morning's lesson. Miss Seymour's attitude seemed to Charlotte to have undergone the most subtle of changes, as if in some mysterious way she realized the transformation in her pupil's soul and was seeking to convey her appreciation of it. Her tone was no longer that of a preceptor, but delicately that of one recognizing equality. This revived in Charlotte her former high mood of exaltation, lost temporarily, it has to be admitted, in her rather mundane exchange with Mr. Paisley and the resultant satisfaction in her own savoir faire. She again saw herself as one of the chosen and felt to the full the weight of responsibility involved. Her mood differed little in intensity from that originally evoked by the twilight music and soft-toned shadows of the old church. It differed, however, in that, out in the open, it took on a practical turn. That Charlotte herself was good and always would be good was fully established in her mind as an indisputable tenet. The point that struck her quite forcibly now was the need to turn that goodness to account—round up, as it were, some poor stray sheep and lure him back to fold comforts with a dazzling display of gentle logic. Her mind veered quite simply and naturally in the direction of her brother Philip. Her dislike for Philip was a deep-rooted thing. He tormented her; he used spurs on his horses; he played

poker on Sunday. Charlotte's eyes gave forth a smoldering light.

She held Miss Seymour's hand a long time as they said good-by. A lingering farewell seemed the appropriate thing under the circumstances. Charlotte would have liked Miss Seymour to kiss her on the forehead,—in fact, did her best to provoke such a demonstration. She stood on tiptoe and pushed back her thick locks from her face to indicate there *was* room if Miss Seymour should feel so inclined. Miss Seymour, however, contented herself with a last gentle pressure of the fingers and the parting admonition:

"Go home and rest, dear. Remember it is the Lord's day."

Charlotte lost herself after that in a subdued contemplation of the dignity of her lot. Suzanne, meanwhile, kept expostulating with her for walking too fast. It was hot; Mademoiselle would *ruin* her complexion in the sun. Then suddenly they turned a corner to discover Philip in his high red dog-cart, with Billy Dunscomb and Cass Laurence alounge at his side.

"Halloa, Charley!" shouted Cass.

Charlotte stopped short and blushed crimson. The flippant tone ill accorded with her Sunday mood. Philip trailed his whip over Suzanne's cherry-laden hat; Suzanne giggled ecstatically.

"Get in; there's lots of room!" cried Billy, with his good-natured square smile.

Charlotte hesitated weakly.

"Get in or stay out," put in Philip, impatiently, "but don't stand there like a gawk."

Charlotte's eyes blazed. Under ordinary conditions she would have clambered into the rig and attacked Philip with all the fury of a young pugilist. Such brawls were a part of the daily schedule, the delight of Philip's friends, who provoked them with conscious malice. And the odds were not always on Philip's side!

Charlotte took a quick step forward and then stopped, trembling with rage. Philip let his whip play insolently over her bare legs. This seemed the last ignominy, for Charlotte was becoming terribly, painfully conscious of those bare legs that Paddy insisted on covering so inadequately with socks. Cass began to whistle a popular air. Charlotte took another step forward; a row seemed inevitable.

Then as she clenched her hands, she became conscious of something she was holding. A strange thrill went through her as she realized it was her prayer-book. Her wrath dropped. She relaxed and forced to her lips a sweet, gentle smile.

"No, thank you, Philip," she said quietly. "I prefer to walk. I don't believe in riding on Sunday."

A shout of mirth greeted her, but Charlotte, still impressed by her new vision of higher things, rather welcomed the roar of ridicule as pointing the reality of her martyrdom. She drew herself up and with all the dignity she could muster, despite the consciousness of her dreadful brown legs, she walked away triumphant.

CHAPTER II

IT was cool and restful in the drawing-room; yet the intense blue of the pond, glimpsed through the long French windows, conveyed the sense of the summer's heat. Idle Ease (it was Paddy's choice of name) was a charming place with its vista of pond and ocean, its stretches of green, its unexpected, disconcerting nooks of brilliant flowers. One would never have recognized it as the thoroughly conventional place Paddy had purchased ten years before. But Paddy had the knack. She did n't go at things by degrees, a tentative flower garden here, a new hedge there. Her methods were drastic, the destruction in her wake as thorough and complete as ever that left by Oriental typhoon. She rooted up; she razed; she over-rode partitions as easily as she did the objections of her so-called "consulting" architect. The resulting chaos was hideous, but it was a part of Paddy's genius that in that very chaos she should find her inspiration. Her judgment was as unerring in the constructive process as in the destructive. In her brilliant, erratic way, quite reckless of every practical consideration, Paddy

worked out her inner vision and always with triumphant results. Idle Ease was as artistic a perfected whole as the most exacting connoisseur could demand.

John Henderson was alone in the drawing-room. He let his eyes wander about with accurate appraisal of its refinements so subtly studied, its beauties so unerringly achieved. He loved that room always. Usually in contemplation of its low-toned harmony he could rest happy and contented. But to-day, pervaded with the atmosphere of summer twilight, it carried a strange sadness, a time-worn dissatisfaction, the ache of an old regret.

John Henderson had started out in life, aquiver with the creative instinct, with a supreme confidence in his own destiny. He had meant to paint and force recognition of the power that was indisputably his. But his career had been sacrificed to the demands of his cousin Paddy, who, upon the break with her husband, had summoned him peremptorily to her side, to straighten out the skein of her marital tangles. So he had perforce given up the satisfaction of achievement, the glow of inspiration, to bask in the luxury of the Baird fortune. He was indolent; that was the secret of it. But to-day, somehow, he felt the stir of old desires, the vague urgency of an unfulfilled need. He shook himself free of his reverie at last and rang for a brandy and

soda. Then he glimpsed Paddy, coming up the slope from the pond, her arms full of summer flowers. She was in a soft mauve slink dress, a large hat of artful droop shading her eyes to dusky glow. She waved to him as he rose and strolled out upon the terrace.

His eyes followed her as she came closer. Small, yet of an attenuated slenderness, she seemed at a distance not more than a girl. But one glance of the tawny eyes with their baffling quality of restless mockery and Paddy stood confessed,—a cynical woman of thirty-eight, with youth long since forfeit to experience. There was that about her every movement that cried of nerves stretched to the last pitch of vibration, that pointed an exquisite harmony sustained too long. She talked incessantly, with a quick, altogether incoherent but very charming irrelevance. She was vastly amusing with a random wit, but the cynicism that underlay her most trifling utterances had a strange power of blight. Her casual acquaintances, however, diverted by her scintillations, had no sense of the withered trail her wild-fire left behind. But those who cared for Paddy came to know the truth inevitably, though with a gradual awakening to it. It was only after his own ambitions, hopes, beliefs had perished miserably that John Henderson, himself, had realized the sweep of Paddy's insidious influence.

Yet even that would not have mattered, had he been sure that he filled some genuine need in Paddy's life. But, despite her effusive revelations, Paddy was a being so remote that to attribute to her the need of any human tie was a ridiculous mockery. She had asked him to stay and he had stayed through the years, but with a quickening protest that his own devotion to her could evoke no answering response, only a random acceptance. The part he had played in her life was an unheroic one, to say the least, and he resented the fact with a vague bitterness.

Paddy smiled up at him as she came closer. Her eyes approved him as he stood there. Of a smooth slenderness of structure, he gave the sense of a fine gentility that could flourish only in a world sorted and arranged. This gentility was a thing peculiarly physical, yet extending to impalpabilities. His every movement produced the effect of an expressive gesture, betokening a sensibility too keen, an instinct too refined for vulgar contacts. Yet he indulged in no striking deflections from ordinary custom. One had the sense that it was not what he said or did but what he withheld that marked him with his sign of restrained quality, of tempered intensity.

He forced himself to smile in answer to Paddy's greeting, but he fancied she read his depression back of the effort. She struck a flippant vein perversely.

"Mon Dieu!" she cried, flinging herself on a couch. "I am désolée. A cigarette, please. Yes, a brandy and soda, too! My dear man, such a disaster, such a sickening catastrophe! Just ring for Parsons to take these flowers; you're sitting all over them. *Have* you heard?"

She gave him a slanting glint from her dark eyes as he lighted her cigarette. He noted the shake of her hand, the slight nervous twitch of the muscles about her mouth as he bent toward her. He sighed involuntarily and proceeded to take a cigarette himself.

"Have you heard?" she repeated a little sharply.

He shook his head. "Another onslaught of creditors? There's one about due, I should say."

Paddy laughed.

"No, it's about Charley," she explained.

Hendy raised his eyebrows in amusement.

"Been beating up Suzanne again?" he asked.

Paddy made a gesture of denial. Hendy smiled into her eyes.

"What is it, then?" he asked.

Paddy inhaled her cigarette deeply by way of provoking suspense. Then—

"The infant believes in God!" she brought out in a tone of mock tragedy.

Hendy laughed. Paddy forged ahead, the colloquial French in which she usually expressed herself

giving way in her excitement to a haphazard English.

"And not only believes in God, but the twelve apostles and the Holy Ghost. Let's see, *did* she mention the Holy Ghost? Yes, I believe she did. Adam and Eve, too! Now, Hendy, something's got to be done. She *has* to be disillusioned before it's too late. Can't we dig up an old scandal? There *was* some talk at one time about Adam and a woman named Lilith, but the details have escaped me. I couldn't give it to the child offhand. And you know, as to the record of some of the others—"

Hendy put in a quick remonstrance. You never could tell what liberties Paddy would take even with the reputation of the Deity. Hendy could still be nervous as to just what she was going to say next.

"How did it happen?" he asked quickly.

"Well," Paddy nodded. "Mr. Paisley, the rector, called soon after we left last fall and lured Charley to church. Thought she was lonely, I suppose—"

"Perhaps she was," Hendy said quietly, his eyes steady in Paddy's restless ones.

Paddy saw fit to ignore this.

"Of course I had no idea Charley was old enough to get into mischief," she went on glibly. "I must talk to her, reason with her."

"Go at it gently, Paddy," he advised. "She's a sensitive youngster."

Paddy had a sudden veer.

"I had a note from Mr. Robinson yesterday," she said. "I forgot to tell you."

"Bad?" he asked.

"Awful!" she ejaculated. "He says we've *got* to retrench. I shall buy out the Avenue stores tomorrow for fear the rumor's reached here. It's the only way of quieting doubt in the minds of the tradespeople."

"I get my quarterly next week," said Hendy, a slight bitterness in his tone. "That might cover your paper bill, Paddy."

Paddy put a hand on his for a fleeting second and looked into his eyes. They hung so just long enough for the old baffling mockery in hers to reassert itself. Then she rose and, throwing away her cigarette, confessed frankly to a yawn.

"It's so hot—mon Dieu! Let's go in. A champagne cup—"

It was characteristic of Paddy that her fitful energy could not endure for long the strain of any one situation, no matter how agreeable that situation in itself might be. She was happy only in a perpetual state of motion. The whither and the whence meant little to her, but the caravan must ever be

on the move. So she progressed from continent to continent, or room to room, as the case might be.

Hendy was used if not reconciled to her volatility. He rose now and followed her into the deeper cool of the drawing-room, where she wandered about, rearranging the flowers Parsons had distributed with provoking carelessness. Hendy noticed with a dull pang how tired and worn Paddy looked when her face was in repose. Without the bewildering light of her strange eyes to dazzle one she looked ill, almost haggard. With an unexpected impulse he had gone over and taken her hands.

"Paddy," he said, and there was a real pain in his eyes, "why, *why* do you go on this way?"

She tried to draw away from him quickly, on the defensive at once. But he held her firmly.

"You are ill; you must take care of yourself. Can't you see what it means to the rest of us—"

He spoke in a low, incisive voice; Paddy smiled faintly as she closed her eyes to the quiet intensity of his plea. It was really the first time Hendy had ever asserted himself just that way. She rather liked it. His grip on her thin wrists was like iron. Then she caught the words "for Charlotte's sake." With a quick flare of anger she wrenched her hands away from him, but she had n't the physical strength to sustain any emotion for long. She made a queer

little grimace in his direction. He turned and walked away. Essentially controlled by inhibition, he regretted always his moments of impulse. Paddy struggled to say something, but for once she failed to find the right mot. It was for Hendy to loose the tension. He turned about on his heel and offered her a cigarette.

"Thank you," she said and was grateful to him that the flickering match he held out to her absorbed completely his attention.

Then suddenly the subdued quiet of the Sunday twilight was pierced by an enraged cry from the billiard-room, a cry blurred into a terrific commotion of shouts and screams. There was a general stampeding, a turning over of chairs, a low laugh, the barking of dogs, with Charlotte's shrill voice rising above the din of confusion.

Hendy started for the door just as it burst open with fearful force, disclosing a very red and disheveled Charlotte, with Philip in close pursuit. Billy Dunscomb and Cass Laurence in noisy amusement brought up the rear, with the dogs yelping and jumping about in blind fury. In the pack of cards Charlotte hugged to her bosom Hendy read the secret of the fray. But before he quite grasped the significance of the scene, Charlotte and Philip had closed disastrously in the middle of the room.

Paddy's laugh rang out as a table went over, but Hendy was angry. Philip was a sullen brute; he had no business to torment Charlotte. Hendy seized him roughly, and stood between the two.

"Let her alone, Philip," he commanded. Philip attempted a surly justification of himself. Charlotte dodged under Hendy's arm and gave Philip a resounding punch in the stomach. Old Man Blink and the Rowdy yelped in encouragement of their mistress's tactics. Billy and Cass shouted loudly. It was ridiculous. Even Philip's white heat faded to reluctant amusement. Hendy seized Charlotte and held her, screaming and wriggling, still making mad attempts to get at her opponent. Each feint was greeted with a roar of delight from Billy and Cass. Hendy controlled his own mirth with difficulty.

Paddy assumed a look of deep reproach.

"Charley dear, what a disgraceful brawl on a Sunday afternoon!" she remonstrated gently.

"He was playing for money!" shouted Charlotte, wildly.

"You would n't have him *work* for money!" put in Paddy, with a knowing look in Billy's direction. Paddy always played up, or rather down, to the boys' appreciation of her flippancy; they one and all adored her and laughed at her every word as at a master sally. She cheapened herself wittingly in

their presence, the more so as she knew this irritated Hendy.

"It's wrong! wrong!" said Charlotte, now on the verge of tears. She recognized a certain quality in her mother's tone that she had come to realize meant antagonism to herself.

"It's wrong," she reiterated weakly.

"But it's pleasant, my child," nodded Paddy, sagely.

Charlotte began to tremble violently as Paddy turned to Cass.

"Charlotte's discovered there's a God," she explained in mock confidence. "It's a trying period for a young person—"

Hendy sought to intervene, but Charlotte's big eyes were fixed on her mother.

"There *is* a God!" she cried hoarsely.

"My poor dear child," answered Paddy, "you've *got* to get over that idea. No intelligent person over seven ever believes there's a God, any more than he believes there's a Santa Claus—"

"Paddy!" remonstrated Hendy, angrily.

Charlotte stared, incredulous. Again that baffled discouragement she always felt in her mother's presence!

"Mr. Paisley—" she gasped.

"That's his business, not his belief." Paddy was lucid.

"Miss Seymour—" muttered Charlotte.

Paddy laughed.

"My blessed infant," she explained with gentle patience, "Miss Seymour is without a doubt in *love* with the Paisley creature—"

A mean thrust, and no one gaged the meanness of it more accurately than Paddy herself. But there was that in Hendy's close-lipped anger as he stood there trying to silence her that goaded her on to a perverse unreasonableness.

The unrestrained mirth of the boys, the covert smile of the footman, seeking to bring order out of the chaos of overturned furniture, showed Paddy that her wit had scored. But the look Hendy bestowed upon her as he gathered the weeping Charlotte in his arms pointed with poignant force the cheapness of her victory.

CHAPTER III

CHARLOTTE awakened the next morning with a few misgivings, that was all. Her reactions were healthy ones. The quiet talk with Hendy, and a good night's rest had succeeded in drawing the sting of tragedy. Hendy had pointed out that scenes of any sort were in very bad taste, that nothing could possibly justify a brawl. Charlotte was properly contrite; a little ashamed, too, that Paddy should have been a witness of her misconduct. Not that Charlotte's sense of a mission had abated in any way! Certainly not! But she must be more discriminating of method in future. With Paddy's words somewhere in the back of her busy brain, she unconsciously dodged the thought of Mr. Paisley and Miss Seymour as embodying another perplexing problem she was not prepared to meet. So she deliberately turned her mind to the practical considerations of her toilet. As she sat in her tub, watching Suzanne's deft manipulation of the divers brushes and soaps, she wondered if Philip was angry. Then came a sharp terror. She was going to drive Philip's horses that afternoon in the

horse show. Could Philip be poor sport enough to throw her over at the last moment? Philip was mean enough for anything. A nervous apprehension seized her. She found Suzanne impudent when she complained of her slowness. Susanne muttered things which Charlotte ignored loftily. That was the way Paddy acted toward refractory domestics.

She went downstairs to find great excitement in the hall. Philip in riding-togs was pacing up and down, swearing loudly. Two of the grooms were arguing with him. One glimpse of their insolent faces and all of Charlotte's animosity toward her brother was dissipated. The class instinct, so strong within her, asserted itself. She went up to him, slipping her arm in his, and the two stood boldly aligned against this outside force that had so unexpectedly risen to threaten their position.

"What is it?" Charlotte asked Philip.

One of the grooms grinned foolishly. Then, catching Paddy's voice in argument at a distance, Charlotte got the sordid truth of the situation. Instantly her temper rose in fierce rejection of that truth. She took a step forward, with blazing eyes.

"What are you doing in here?" she cried, addressing the grooms.

The two men looked at each other uneasily, obviously at a loss. It was one thing to defy Mr.

Philip, quite another to hurt their adored Miss Charlotte.

"Wait outside," commanded Charlotte with a fine imperiousness and pointed to the veranda.

The two men slunk out sheepishly.

"The damned insolent puppies!" muttered Philip.

"What is it about?" gasped Charlotte.

"They've attached the horses—"

Paddy's voice came to them at this point, penetrating and shrill:

"But, my dear man, it's simply preposterous! Talk to my lawyer if you must, but as for annoying *me* with details about money—Now *do* sit down and act like a human being. Parsons, for Heaven's sake, pour him some whisky—"

One of the footmen passed through the hall. Charlotte collected herself sufficiently to make her way to the dining-room. As Paddy had said once: "Formalities must be observed, whatever the cosmic disturbance." Charlotte remembered this as she seated herself at the table. Poor Paddy! Charlotte measured the hurt to her mother's pride by the throb of her own resentment.

She gave her orders coolly, her bright eyes challenging the thoughts of the servants who tended her. She forced herself to eat, all the while her attention strained to catch the slightest sound in the next room.

"Of course—a check on any bank you name. London—Paris! They all know me. I'm on dining terms with every bank president on the Continent. Bank presidents—charming men as a rule!"

"I wish to God Paddy would n't make such a fool of herself," muttered Philip as he came into the room, but Charlotte did not hear. The next minute Paddy put her head in at the door, and, with an inimitable little grimace that marked her as thoroughly enjoying the situation, she said:

"Philip, would you mind finding Hendy? There's a really charming man here named Sullivan I'm sure he'd enjoy meeting."

Hendy had that very minute put in a rather bewildered appearance at the French window. Paddy buttonholed him and with many incoherent explanations and a deal of by-play led him back to the drawing-room.

"A really absorbing gentleman, Hendy. There's much we can learn from him. He tells me my checks are no good. Now, fancy that! Mr. Sullivan, this is my cousin, Mr. Henderson. Yes, *do* have another drink. My whisky is good, if my credit is n't."

A few minutes later Charlotte heard Hendy's restrained laugh, then a voice she adjudged belonging to the Sullivan. Mr. Sullivan had been incited by Paddy to tell an anecdote. He must

have told it well, from the warm response it evoked; Paddy laughed uncontrollably. Charlotte felt better.

Then Paddy was moved to admit things frankly to Mr. Sullivan. She confessed with charming simplicity to her extravagance. She never *could* resist pretty clothes; but, after all, why should she? A woman's mission in life was to wear pretty clothes even if she couldn't afford to pay for them. But as to that, *she* was perfectly safe.

"Hendy, do tell the dear man about the Bairds and the Warrens. The Bairds are my husband's people, the Warrens my own. Considerate, all of them, to a degree. Every time I get in a tight place for funds some dear old spinster aunt in the Virginia wilds dies, and there you are! I've had one fortune from Aunt Susan, another from Uncle Merrylegs, a third—Hendy, you give him the details. There are a half-dozen others left. I'll give you a note payable within thirty days of the death of any of the sweet old things you happen to pick—which reminds me—"

A racy little anecdote of Monte Carlo followed; Mr. Sullivan came back with a Fall River experience. Hendy strolled into the dining-room at this point.

"It's quite all right, darling," he said to Charlotte, touched by the anxiety and worry in her eyes. "It's a dreadful mistake, that's all. Run up and get into

your riding-things; we'll take a little canter this morning to get you limbered up—"

It *was* quite all right, as events proved. Mr. Sullivan was brought to gracious terms. Paddy was not the "damned fool" her son thought her. The public at large, the tradespeople, considered her crazy and she knew it. It was for her to make capital of their opinion.

"Unlimited money there," so her creditors pronounced, "but she so woefully mismanages it."

An occasional attachment occurred, ending in glib promises on Paddy's part, but she was pretty generally left alone.

So now, when she babbled of the three or four fortunes she had played ducks and drakes with, and the three or four more she intended with good faith to do the same by, Mr. Sullivan considered the only gentlemanly thing to do was to withdraw. Besides, there was the matter of the whisky. Paddy had offered to send a bottle or two to his rooms.

"A woman who knows good whisky when she sees it must be sound," he argued with true Celtic logic, and so the matter ended.

"The horses are yours," Paddy remarked gaily to Philip as she met him in the hall afterward. "Make the most of them. We may have to kill and eat the sweet pets before long."

Paddy was exultant. Encounters of this sort,

spurring her on to tricky manœuvre, acted like tonic to her nerves. The quick of her sensitiveness had long since been covered by a thick-skinned satisfaction in her ability as a wily strategist. With Charlotte it was different. A fierce pride was the dominating note of her nature, a pride that could ill brook concession to anything less fine than itself. The scene with Mr. Sullivan was the first one of the sort the significance of which Charlotte had fully grasped. Her mother had been obliged to make compromise with some one beneath her. Charlotte's mortification took the form of a violent defiance directed against the world at large, which, in her youthful unreason, she held to be maliciously responsible for her chagrin. The result achieved by the morning's ride with Hendy was the dogged determination to put the world in its place. Just how, Charlotte did not know; her mind in its seething state of protest could not as yet be brought to focus.

Only as she cantered into the exhibit ring at the Casino that afternoon did she see her particular opportunity. She surmised shrewdly from the titter of recognition that greeted her that the incident of the morning had leaked out. Poor Paddy! Well, it was for Charlotte to point how little any material consideration could affect the Baird spirit. She reined in her horse and with dignified self-possession walked him about the ring, conscious to the

full of the perfect fit of her riding-habit, her nice control of the horse's every move. Not a detail of the scene escaped her,—the gay blur of the boxes, the crowds of soberer hue pressed so eagerly against the rail, the scattered grooms adjusting the hurdles. She got all the thrill of the music with its provocative syncopation and lively lilt.

The horses were called in to the center of the ring. Charlotte slipped from her saddle, ran her eyes with critical coolness over the horses near her, and then waited. Her erect little figure might have been that of a boy as she stood there. The brown of her habit toned perfectly with the brown of her skin and hair. Several of the judges strayed to her side, with approving glance.

The first two or three jumpers had but indifferent success. Then came Dolly Laurence, Cass's cousin. Charlotte had always spurned Dolly as a companion; partly because Dolly did not know how to "play" in Charlotte's athletic sense of the word; partly, too, it must be admitted, because Dolly in her reputation as first heiress of the land stirred Charlotte to a stubborn jealousy. Paddy had sought to promote a friendship between the two; Charlotte had been polite but cold.

She noticed now with a certain satisfaction as Dolly's number was called that Dolly took her saddle with a deplorable lack of ease. Her blond curls

fluttered in the breeze and she sat stiffly, looking for all the world like a wide-eyed doll. She was obviously terrified and managed to communicate her terror to the horse, for each time a hurdle was discovered in his path he balked miserably. The spectators laughed in a kindly way; Dolly's feelings were hurt. A second later she was ignominiously given the gate, and before Charlotte could quite make up her mind whether she was glad or sorry, she heard her own number called.

The murmur of the crowd that had so frightened poor Dolly spurred Charlotte to spectacular efforts. She swung into her saddle, sauntered easily about the ring, and then put her horse with a quick spurt straight at the highest hurdle. The startled gasp of the onlookers broke to a shout of bewildering applause that swelled louder and louder as, without a second's respite, Charlotte and her horse swept around the ring, taking one hurdle after another with the abandon of a superb control. A remarkable spectacle that brought the most indifferent to his feet, shouting unqualified approval. Charlotte's triumph was complete. She had forced from that gaping audience a recognition of her powers; Paddy had been avenged.

A groom had been despatched to call her in. She glimpsed Philip and Billy by the gate, shrieking like maniacs. Then there was Paddy in a front box,

nodding her head in amused approval, with Hendy by her side, a little strained and white. Buchanan Laurence, Dolly's father, was in the ring and hastened to her side with boisterous congratulations. The music started up again; Charlotte got her blue ribbon amidst vociferous applause. Then she turned to the gate and rode slowly out. Here again, the center of a noisy throng, she got the satisfied sense of her success. It was with a genuine feeling of pity that she could meet Dolly, who had struggled through the crowd to her side.

"Father says my horse is much better than yours," she wailed, clinging to Charlotte's hand, "but I'm such a damned bad rider."

Billy and Phil quite broadly laughed at her; Dolly began to cry. Charlotte put her arms about the poor little thing. This glimpse of a new Dolly—a trembling, weak, fearful Dolly—was of an unexpected appeal. Instead of stigmatizing her as a "cry-baby," Charlotte felt an unexpected stir of the instinct of protection. She and Dolly left the show that night hand in hand, their friendship in full flower. The acquisition of a girl friend was the crowning point of Charlotte's day.

The next two days were happy ones for Charlotte. Her momentary animosity toward the world at large merged with her continuous success into a genial warmth of regard for everybody. As she walked

through the crowded boxes, she was met on all sides by smiles and bows and nods of approval. Her every entrance to the ring was greeted with enthusiastic acclaim. She had the satisfied sense of doing something well and adored the general adulation. The three days of the show were brilliant ones. She offered the last day to ride one of Dolly's horses, taking the championship against Philip's "Lassie." Dolly's blue-eyed gratitude quite offset Philip's anger, and evoked in Charlotte a pleasing melancholy, born of self-sacrifice.

Paddy was giving a dinner the last night of the show for Philip's young friends.

Paddy's relation to society was exactly what she in her perversity had chosen to make it. As Patricia Warren, the charming if somewhat erratic young Southern heiress, she had been able to dictate her own terms. Then had come the disconcerting marriage with George Baird. To be sure, the Bairs had plenty of money,—position, too, for that matter,—but George with his sullen temper and rather brutish crudities was the last man in the world one would have connected up with the dainty Patricia. Perhaps it was simply that Paddy had tired of the exacting surveillance of her divers relatives, to whom she in her tender orphanage had been intrusted, and had plunged into a random matrimony for the sake of a larger freedom. Certainly,

subsequent events would argue the marriage *not* a romantic one, for Paddy had behaved abominably from the very beginning, so mismanaging her improprieties that they could be construed only as a direct defiance of opinion, a sort of flippant bravado toward those it should have been her part, as an indiscreet young wife, to conciliate. Paddy's misdemeanors did *not* hold together; it was this Society was reluctant to forgive. Still, Paddy was diverting. Had she shown, upon her return to Newport following the break with her husband, the slightest contrition for her defiance, Society with inconsequent magnanimity would have folded her to its bosom. But Paddy was reported as saying in all flippancy that she had n't the slightest intention of playing the part of the returned prodigal, that she preferred roast pig every time to fatted calf. All tentative advances ceased after that and Paddy was let alone.

With the younger generation, however, it was different. Philip was a handsome boy. As for Charlotte, with her brown hair and legs and eyes, she promised to make interesting reading for some youth in the not very distant future. Thus, juvenile Newport was suffered to patronize the Baird parties without compromising the dignity of their elders. The parties were overwhelmingly popular, with a splash and dash and brilliant queerness all their

own. It was for Paddy to create an atmosphere of ebullient irresponsibility; the young people reacted with abandon.

Dolly was permitted to stay all night with Charlotte, and the two children, eager-eyed and excited, sat up till eleven. Some of the boys, when they happened to think about it, took occasion to dance with them, and in a snake-dance that was instituted later the two were carried high in the air at the head of the procession. When the leaders began a sortie out on the lawn, taking hedge and flower garden alike as hurdles, Hendy saw fit to interfere.

Paddy was in her element, darting here and there like a firefly. The musicians were in high spirits; the music was continuous. So, too, the popping of the champagne corks. It was a glorious night, the full moon flinging a yellow light over everything, house and gardens, pond and ocean. Charlotte sought out Hendy on the terrace.

"You like it, Mignon?" he smiled.

Charlotte threw her arms about him and confessed herself ecstatic. She pointed to the moon. Dolly had joined them now, a little bewildered and with sash awry. She volunteered the information that Philip had given her some champagne and she was *pompette*.

Hendy was disconcerted; he sought out Paddy.

A few minutes later Suzanne rounded up her young charges and led them to the upper regions. She showed unpleasant signs of a giggling garrulity. Dolly nudged Charlotte, but Charlotte had only a quick impatience at Suzanne's maunderings and dismissed her curtly when the essentials of the toilet were over. The Rowdy was consigned to Dolly; Charlotte cradled Old Man Blink in her arms. Then she and Dolly settled to bed and the delight of intimate confidence. They talked a queer mixture of French and English that but accentuated their childish irrelevance. Frocks and hats, the horse show, ice-cream flavors, and other scattering topics of general interest came first. Then, the faint rosy glow of the night lamp between them inviting deeper revelation, they came around to the intensely personal.

Charlotte sought to convey to Dolly something of her recent religious experiences, but Dolly's wide blue eyes failed of the right response. So Charlotte veered tactfully and talked in low tones of her devotion to Paddy. She adored Paddy above everything else in the world. Paddy was perfect; Paddy was supreme. Dolly's cue was to lament pathetically that *she* had no mother. Then by a primitive sequence they began to touch on the subject of fathers. Dolly said her father was indifferent to her. This wrung from Charlotte a protest,

"Oh, no!" Upon seeing the sentimental satisfaction Dolly took in the alleged neglect, however, she corrected it hastily to "How terrible!"

Charlotte went on to say she had seen her own father only a few times, but she was sure he was a bad man. Dolly was eager for details.

Charlotte knew none, but said she suspected he drank. Whereupon Dolly came back with the surprising statement that her mother would have been alive to-day if she had let alcohol alone. The phraseology was too glib to be Dolly's and Charlotte realized it.

She stared incredulous. Then—"How did you know?" she asked sharply.

Dolly was prompt of reply. She had heard one of the grooms tell one of the maids. Charlotte felt a strange shake of her nerves, an overwhelming sense of the all-wrongness of it. Yet the significance of the terrible fact presented impressed her childish mind less than did the idea of poor little Dolly being dependent on her servants for her information. She herself had been taught never to listen to the gossip of domestics. Her pity for Dolly was the deeper in that she realized of a sudden her own advantage in having Paddy to guide her. Poor Dolly! She must help Dolly, make her understand better things. Her resolutions seethed even as she controlled herself to change the subject. She asked Dolly if she liked

to read; Dolly's interest in literature was an apathetic one. Charlotte quoted a few lines from the "Ode to the West Wind," which Hendy had taught her. A dissertation on Dickens was interrupted by Dolly, stating languidly that she was in love with Philip.

Charlotte was amazed; falling in love was a process she had connected in her mind only with those of riper years. She could meet Dolly's startling statement only by attacking her particular choice.

"But Philip is *horrid*" she said incisively. "He plays poker on Sunday."

Dolly's eyes opened wider.

"But everybody plays poker on Sunday," she brought out with childish logic.

"That does n't make it any more right," said Charlotte, sententiously. She was conscious as she said this that she had uttered something good, something that would have wrung approval from Mr. Paisley and Miss Seymour—even from Paddy.

Dolly, not being strong on ethics, yawned delicately. The Rowdy stirred uneasily as if in the throes of a bad dream; then, putting back his ears, he emitted a dismal wail. Dolly gave a scream. Old Man Blink awoke in protest and barked savagely. Old Man Blink was gentle as a rule; only disturbance of his rest could arouse him to fits of high passion. Dolly gave the Rowdy a sharp

little whack. Charlotte cuddled Blinky to silence. Then both children smothered their laughter and listened.

The revelry was still going on below-stairs. Muffled music could be heard; the occasional crunch of gravel outside as some fugitive couple sought the silence of the mellowing night.

"What time is it?" asked Dolly.

"Two o'clock," said Charlotte, consulting her little jeweled watch on the night table.

A burst of laughter scattered to them from below.

"I wish I was grown up," Dolly sighed pensively.

Charlotte considered this. No, she was glad she was little. It was as if the future held so much in store she wanted years and years in which to get ready for it all. She intended her life to be packed full of things. She thought of how big the world was, of the strange people and queer lands that Paddy talked about. Paddy had been everywhere; she, too, would go everywhere. But this strange, tremulous expectation, evoked by the thought of the future, was of a subtlety that did not lend itself to words. Charlotte did not attempt to explain to the little Dolly, for she knew of a certainty Dolly would never understand. With the conscious art of a true hostess she brought the conversation down to Dolly's level.

"So you are in love with Philip?" she queried

gently. It was exactly the tone she had heard Paddy use to keep up the conversation with some very dull tea guest.

"Madly!" answered Dolly, rousing herself from a second's doze.

Details were in order. Dolly had at her command a number of very telling phrases, which she strung along together with extreme artlessness. Again Charlotte made a shrewd guess as to the origin of Dolly's expressions, and again she felt the welling of a great pity for her in her helplessness. She listened with a compassionate indulgence.

Dolly babbled of beating hearts and romantic dreams and love tokens. Her weak little voice grew weaker as she talked on; then at the top point of a declaration of intensely amorous nature the little voice ceased entirely and Dolly sank into slumber.

Charlotte smiled to herself, as her eyes rested tenderly on her little friend. Dolly made a beautiful picture as she lay there, exquisite, fragile, her delicate childish face crowned with its halo of golden curls. Her blue silk negligée with its ermine collar was pushed aside; one lovely, small but perfect shoulder was disclosed, free of its lacy fetters.

Charlotte got up softly and, bending over Dolly,

extricated the Rowdy from her unresisting arms. The door opened quietly and Hendy tiptoed in. Charlotte put her finger to her lips. Hendy smiled at the scene that met his eyes. Charlotte handed him the sleepy Rowdy, the sleepier Blink, and indicated their baskets. Then she tucked Dolly in with care.

"Is n't she lovely?" she whispered, gazing at her with rapt admiration. "I love people to be beautiful; I love them to be like pictures."

Then, slipping her hand into Hendy's, she gazed up at him with a strange wistfulness.

"Hendy," she whispered, "I should like so much to be able to paint. I should like to paint Dolly."

Hendy had only a second's pause for this. Then, "You will get cold, sweetheart!" he said hurriedly, and taking her in his arms carried her to her own bed. She was sleepy now and admitted it. He kissed her and turned out the light. Old Man Blink got up in a last tired protest, walked around in a circle, and flopped down with a heavy thud. Then, with a sigh of world-weariness, he settled to the darkness and oblivion.

CHAPTER IV

AFTER the horse-show party things went very rapidly in the Baird household. A rumor that George Baird had suffered heavy losses in a recent wheat deal brought to life a swarm of creditors with unbelievable powers of buzz.

"Keep them moving and they can't settle to sting," Paddy cried, and sought to distract them individually. She snubbed, she bantered, she cajoled, she flattered. She played one against the other, thereby robbing them of the power that would have been so fatally theirs had they been sensible enough to hang together. Paddy enjoyed the game thoroughly. Hendy went about with a worried look and attempted to make suggestions, which usually died in utterance.

"You poor dear thing!" Paddy would exclaim. "You know as much about business as the Rowdy, so *do* keep out. I'm continually tripping over you at critical moments."

Philip stormed in and out, abusing his mother.

"But everything will turn out all right!" Paddy kept reiterating, and despatched a dozen more

telegrams of erratic appeal to divers Warrens and Bairds, as yet not fully exploited.

Mr. Robinson made his client a hurried visit; presented arguments backed with figures.

"But, for Heaven's sake, *sell* something—stocks, bonds, anything!" Paddy directed with asperity. "This is getting on my nerves. They won't even trust us for a yeast-cake down-town."

Mr. Robinson sought to explain, but Paddy made it clear his explanations were tedious. She made one concession, however, to his agitated earnestness. She agreed to stay in Newport for the winter and retrench. On the strength of this, Mr. Robinson could talk reason to her importunate creditors. So, eventually, matters were again adjusted, settlements guaranteed. Paddy signed her name indiscriminately to everything Mr. Robinson gave her to sign, made blithe oral promises, and then, with as complete a satisfaction as if the disagreeable incident were really closed, she looked about for something to divert her in the winter months that stretched so bleakly ahead. A few partitions were discovered, in the tearing down of which her restless energy found a happy outlet. Then there was the matter of the chimney she had built in the northeast wing of the house. She had always wanted to try a particular type of Norwegian fireplace, in the achievement of which a

special chimney was necessary. The winter months offered fine opportunity for experiment. She added a nectarine house to the already lavish array of greenhouses. All in all, Paddy made rather an amusing go of the winter. Then in April came the news of the death of Uncle Peter Warren. It was with a wicked glint of satisfaction that Paddy telegraphed Kurzman for her mourning, the White Star Line for an early booking.

"Have you any idea how much it will mean to you?" Hendy ventured.

"At least enough to get out of Newport!" answered Paddy, carelessly, and, with a fine disregard of particulars, let it go at that.

The winter had been a very gay one for Charlotte, in happy contrast to the loneliness of the preceding one, which she had spent by herself. To have Paddy with her for so long a stretch seemed an unbelievably precious boon. Philip, Billy, and Cass were at St. George's, including Charlotte and Hendy in all their sports. Storm after storm piled the snow to deeper drifts, with the result of the most breathless coasting, the maddest skiing. Charlotte was of an astounding vigor and daring. Yet she never hesitated for an instant to forego her sport to walk by the side of Dolly's sled whenever Dolly put in an appearance. Dolly had been left in Newport for her health.

"It will do her good to rough it for a winter," Buchanan Laurence had said with conviction.

Roughing it, in Dolly's sense, consisted of getting up about noon and then being drawn on her sled up and down some nicely graduated walk with two maids attendant. The very sight of a big double-runner whizzing by at top speed brought Dolly a shiver of fear and made her dizzy. Dolly's attitude toward Charlotte, now that the horse show had faded into the dimness of things past, had undergone a perceptible change. It is possible she had heard rumors of the Bairds' financial straits, for her domestics were ever conscientious of report. But, whatever the cause, there was a languid superiority in Dolly's air. Hendy resented this, but said nothing to Charlotte, as he had come to guess the value she so naïvely set upon the new friendship. This friendship had, in a way, supplanted the religious trend of the previous year, having the advantage of being stamped with Paddy's approval. Charlotte still went to church, to be sure, but her intercourse with Dolly was the thing that really absorbed her.

So it was the news of the projected trip abroad, though arousing in her a confused sense of joyous anticipation, brought, too, a pang of sincere regret. She must leave Dolly. Dolly was her first girl friend and she felt no other the years might bring

would ever be the same. She went about the house during the weeks of busy preparation with a forlorn wonder at the strange mixture of her feelings. It was only when Hendy talked to her of the beauties of Florence and promised to see to it that she should learn to paint that Charlotte could lose the dull ache of her homesickness.

She went to say good-by to Miss Seymour and Mr. Paisley.

"It's the right thing to do," Hendy encouraged her.

"It's the *polite* thing to do," corrected Paddy.

"I'm going to be a great painter," Charlotte told her Sunday-school teacher, with a hint of condescension in her tone. It was evidence of Paddy's peculiar power of blight that Charlotte's faith in Miss Seymour had not been so absolute since the eventful poker party, with all that it entailed of malicious suggestion.

Charlotte's call extended a tedious half-hour. She left with a vague wish that Miss Seymour would dress better and a wonder that nice people could serve such wretched tea.

Mr. Paisley fared but little better in the sharpness of his young visitor's discernment. He talked of God. Charlotte felt the dull little study not at all a fitting background for the glory of his topic.

She shut her eyes and summoned a vision of the mellow old church with its mysterious thrill of twilight ecstasy. Then she opened them to a mission desk of hopeless proportions. She arose with dignity.

"I'm sure I shall always know right from wrong, Mr. Paisley," she said quietly and put out her perfectly gloved little hand to say good-by.

After that the crowded hours blurred confusedly in Charlotte's mind. She was fortunately too excited to think and so got through the last critical moments with a surprising ebullience. Even at the steamer, when Dolly clung to her and cried pathetic, pretty little tears, Charlotte failed of the true emotional response, so distracted was she by the gay scene about her. She loved the well-dressed crowd, now scattering, now settling in groups, laughing, pushing, eager-eyed, excited. She loved the noise of it all,—the din, the shouts, with all the while, deep down, a steady muffled beat like the throb of a great heart.

Paddy arrived at the steamer late; she had been lunching with her husband and seemed somewhat distrait.

"Quite impossible!" she dropped to Hendy. "Ordered oysters *out* of season; fancy that!"

Then she turned to Philip, feeling the occasion called for motherly advice.

"*Don't* get your teeth knocked out playing football, and for Heaven's sake *don't* let your professors spoil your French accent!"

Several camera men had stepped up now. Paddy's exploits had always delighted the press inordinately. Paddy smiled graciously, drew her expensive furs about her, and the snap was taken. Then it was Charlotte's turn. She made a very pretty picture as she stood there, a little bashful and conscious, with Old Man Blink and the Rowdy in her arms. The other passengers gazed at the Baird group curiously, identifying now one, now another. Buchanan Laurence was spotted at once, a familiar figure to those who knew New York night life. The genial-looking boy with the square smile was Billy Dunscomb, one day the heir to countless millions! As for that little golden-haired mite, *she* was "Buck" Laurence's daughter. Don't you remember? It was *her* mother who—Yes, the attractive little dark woman is Mrs. George Baird. Oh, dear no! they have n't lived together for years. She's just come into another fortune. The nice-looking man is a cousin, I believe—By the way, what deck are you on? We must have some bridge—

"We'll be back in a year or two," Paddy was telling Buchanan Laurence. "So good of you to have sent the champagne. Invite Philip for the holidays occasionally, will you?"

More laughter, a greater bustle, the insistent clang of a bell, and with hurried good-bys those who were not to sail pressed in a quick crush down the gang-plank. Those left behind crowded instinctively to the rail. Last messages were shouted, hands and hats and veils waved; then the great majestic steamer glided with a superb dignity out into the river. The dock with its crowded confusion faded slowly into the distance. It seemed to Charlotte that the last distinguishable gleam was that of Dolly's golden curls as, held high on Philip's shoulder, she waved feebly a last adieu.

Charlotte was a child of strange, unaccountable reactions. Hendy had expected, as the steamer left the dock, an "emotional crisis"—Paddy's jocose term for the periodical fits of sobbing that Charlotte had been subject to from babyhood. But, instead, he found Charlotte light-heartedly happy, buoyed up by the gay adventure. It was only as they neared the end of their trip that her spirits showed any signs of flagging. She grew pensive; her shadowy eyes registered the disturbance of her thoughts.

"What is it, Mignon?" Hendy asked her as they sat, late one night, watching the moon climb the blue wall of the heavens.

"I wonder what is going to happen to us over here!" she whispered half to herself.

So that was it! Hendy could understand now.

Youth's vague, unformed fear of the unknown!

"Florence is going to happen to us," he said lightly and began to talk of Andrea and Michel Angelo and the cypress-trees.

A factitious exhilaration was produced by docking and the making of train connections. Charlotte was afforded only a glimpse of Naples,—picturesque, colorful, teeming, with Vesuvius a graceful menace against the blue Italian sky. Then they found themselves on the train.

"Florence at six to-morrow morning," Paddy had announced ruefully. "Traveling in Italy is of an unspeakability—"

That night Charlotte lay awake in her narrow little bunk. Her heart beat irregularly; the train, plunging through the darkness, seemed all a part of her thoughts that rushed so precipitously ahead to meet the future. At length, thoroughly exhausted, she fell into a deep slumber that lasted till four o'clock. Then she arose tremulously and without awaking Suzanne she dressed. It was an awkward proceeding, for she was not in the habit of dressing unaided, but the struggle with elusive buttons and strings rather steadied her. She heard Hendy moving about in the next compartment. She knocked ever so gently; the door opened and the two stood smiling at each other in the dim light.

The whole thing took on the nature of a delightful conspiracy, as, with whispered converse, they settled themselves by the window in Hendy's room and sat hand in hand waiting for Florence and the day.

The train plunged on, but one lost now all sense of trivial activity in the great hush of the open heavens. The stars withdrew softly, one by one; then as if by concentrated move they seemed to blend behind the curtain of blackness and through its heavy folds forced a gentle, persistent light. Only gradually did one become conscious it was no longer night: slowly the rolling slopes of the hills were disclosed to view, purple, shadowy, mystical. There seemed a sadness, a reluctance in this yielding of the darkness to the light, as if Nature realized in the coming day the inevitable moil of human activities, the desecration of her calm. A whisper of wind like a great sigh swept the hillsides—a sigh of despair, of weary acquiescence—and forthwith the heavens flared, a crimson conflagration of day's triumph. So swift, so sudden was the transformation as they sat, staring straight into the splendid east, that Charlotte and Hendy had only a startled gasp for the beauties the light unfolded to their bewildered vision. Florence! It lay before them with a mellow loveliness only the centuries can bring to ripe perfection. Set within the hollow of

its beautiful hills, it was like a gem that holds imprisoned within its tempered yellow glow the prismatic fires of former passions.

A delicate slender marble thing rose in graceful domination of the scene.

"The Campanile," Hendy articulated faintly, "Giotto's Campanile!"

But Charlotte saw nothing but the cypress-trees, straight, dark, definite against the glow of the morning light. Inexorable, unyielding, they stand guard over Florence like brooding sentinels, whispering in gloomy converse of dooms and depressions and the eternal melancholy of the ages.

Hendy felt Charlotte's hand tighten on his convulsively. He sought to say something commonplace, but the emotional crisis could be warded off no longer. With a strange choking sound, Charlotte threw her arms about Hendy's neck and gave way to sobs of a pathetically blubbery nature.

At which critical moment Paddy was discovered at the door. It was always Hendy's part to bear the actual physical brunt of such scenes; but it was for Paddy to see to the little decencies that might otherwise be overlooked. So now, she extracted a couple of large handkerchiefs from Hendy's bag and with a running fire of random comment pressed them upon her emotional offspring. Then she withdrew to finish her toilet. If the cypress-trees had stirred

in Paddy any poignant reminder of some early dream, some phase, suppressed and forgotten long ago, there was no hint of it in her glittering eyes as they met Hendy's, nor in her parting words, which made short work of youth's sentimentalities. Hendy could only hold Charlotte to him more closely, with a vague wonder in his mind.

PART II

PART II

CHAPTER V

PADDY had taken on indefinitely a villa outside the Roman Gate. They had gone there at once, winding through high-walled lanes into which the blossoming orchards overdrooped, heavy with dewy fragrance. It was in keeping with Paddy's volatile efficiency that, whatever destination was picked, she was sure to know some one there with a charming villa to be obtained on lease at a moment's notice. This one belonged to the Comtesse Ferraud, a Parisienne of indifferent reputation. It was a beautiful old place crowning an olive-muffled hill, its picturesque decay making nice terms with the comforts and improvements so essential to an exacting generation. Set higher than the surrounding villas, it looked off to the west into a splendid openness, while beneath it the ground declined into the vagueness of olive crops and vineyards. Its long narrow gardens in the manner of a terrace were a tangle of wild roses; lizards sunned themselves on the old stone benches and the crumbling parapet. And everywhere, as far as the eye could reach, the straight dark cypresses cut sharply the luminous haze of Italian color.

Little did Charlotte realize the first morning, as she and Hendy leaned over the parapet, their gaze afar in the long valley of the Arno, that she would watch that same scene for seven years—the beauty of the spring ripen to its summer, the brilliance of the autumn whiten to winter. The same scene, yet, tinged by the delicate aura of her developing consciousness, so different! As Charlotte looked back upon the seven years spent in Florence, she was in no way aware of “growing up.” She thought of her development entirely in terms of understanding and knowledge of the place, the first sight of which in that early dawn had stirred in her so strange a confusion of sadness. The seven years were happy ones; only in their significance as she recalled them in later years did she catch the note of tragedy, of which she was singularly, childishly unaware at the time. The impressions of the first four years crowded and mingled till it was impossible to disentangle one from another. For the most part she and Hendy seemed to be wandering about, hand in hand, through the curious old streets of the city or resting a while in the thicker dusk of some vaulted church. Faded frescos, darkened marble, with their confused intimations of immortal genius and blood history! Vague eternal murmurs of ambitions unachieved, efforts unsustained, illusions forgotten!

Charlotte, even from her earliest years, had shown herself of a delicate susceptibility to impression, of a quick response to the subtle vibrations of mood. It was to the moods of Florence, passionate, complex, resistless, that she responded now with an intensity that swept her on to tears she could not explain, tremulous ecstasies, saddened questionings. And always Hendy was with her to press her hand in understanding, to point out some gayer beauty to distract her from her sadness. In later years a memory of this or that would detach itself from the general blur of events, though with no intimation of when it came in time, what led to it, or with what it was joined.

There was her first visit to the Duomo, Santa Maria del Fiore; she liked the name and kept saying it over to herself with a resolution to study hard, that she might speak Italian as fluently as Paddy and Hendy. Santa Maria del Fiore! They had glimpsed it first from the Via Pecori, Brunelleschi's warm dome against the blue Italian sky. The brightly colored marbles seemed happy and festive; Charlotte's mood responded to the gaiety of their suggestion. Then, one step, and they were plunged into the vast and silent gloom of the interior, the warm, sentient world of sunshine incredibly remote. So unexpected, so dismal, so overpowering in its austerity was it that Charlotte gave a sharp gasp

and clung to Hendy in genuine terror. The awful emptiness of it, the dread stillness! Great columns rose somberly out of the gloom, only to be lost in a deeper gloom above. Bats flitted about in dismal dreariness. The air seemed heavy with forebodings and depressions. The one sinister experience of the years, but one leaving its indelible print! Charlotte never again entered the Duomo.

As for the rest, the bits of Florence gradually fell into place as the pieces of a puzzle fit into a perfect whole. Charlotte came to know her Florence with all thoroughness and all tenderness. There was no forced application, no tourist "doing" of the points of interest, but an absorbing of the very spirit of the place, to the ultimate grasp of its every small detail.

They wandered, she and Hendy, for hours at a time, at first vaguely, with no definite aim; gradually, however, there came to be points where each knew the other wished to linger. Happy moments they were, lost in the mellow contemplation of a Giorgione or in the gladsome spell of a Fra Angelico, with its joy of simple faith. The exquisite light of Santa Maria Novella, the poignant beauty of Santa Croce, the stern calm of the Bargello! Each place evoked a mood and filled its need.

At times they contented themselves with an inconsequent wandering among the curious old

streets about the Borgo Santi Apostoli. The weather-beaten little shrines by the wayside, the battered frescoes, the time-worn fonts! Charlotte was very tender of them all.

So the years passed, barren of actual event, rich in accumulated impression. Charlotte saw less and less of Paddy, who refused sharply to join them in their jaunts. Yet she talked of all things with a remarkable vividness of memory. She had the oddest opinions as to the character and value of the different works of art, defending her interpretations with amusing ingenuity and flippant humor. She even descended to personal remarks, once or twice, at the expense of Hendy's most cherished Madonnas. But for all this, it was perfectly obvious she, too, knew her Florence and appreciated fully the privilege of its possessions.

Charlotte was once moved to a faint curiosity.

"When were you here last?" she questioned.

"I lived here two years," Paddy answered, "before you were born."

The second summer Charlotte and Hendy spent a month at Vallombrosa, away up in the pungent freshness of pines and chestnuts. Hendy pointed out an extravagant villa.

"That was Paddy's place," he remarked with his usual quiet detachment.

"Poor Paddy!" Charlotte murmured.

Hendy looked at her quickly, but she did not explain; she was totally unaware of the fact that her words needed explanation, the change in her point of view being essentially a process of subconscious evolution. The old adoration for Paddy was there, but tinged with a new pity and tenderness. Paddy was no longer in Charlotte's eyes the absolute dictator of a perfected power. She had gradually, pathetically, taken on the nature of a mere mortal, the victim of another's wrong-doing. Charlotte saw her mother's youth, beauty, happiness exacted as sacrifice to her father's selfish whims; that within her which made so sharp a distinction between the right and the wrong resented hotly the injustice of it.

George Baird, in a frenzied effort to cover previous losses, had involved himself in one wildcat scheme after another, to a greater and greater irregularity of his wife's allowance. It was annoying; it was disconcerting; it was beastly. Thus Paddy at intervals. The terms of high tragedy in which Charlotte interpreted her father's defection, and her mother's consequent sufferings, were not Paddy's terms. Paddy was of a remarkable tolerance; she could forgive her husband everything except his stupidity.

As to Uncle Peter's legacy, *that* had been a startling surprise, not only because of the very diminutive amount bequeathed his dear niece,

Patricia Baird, but as indicating a possible trend of the divers other Warrens, yet to pass on and yet to bequeath.

Paddy was quite frankly in a hole after one year in Florence.. Retrenchments were again in order. Thérèse, Paddy's personal maid, was opportunely discovered guilty of some immorality. Paddy held up her hands in horror, dismissing the girl at once.

"Suzanne can look out for both of us very easily," Paddy said brightly and Charlotte accepted it. Not so Suzanne! The arrangement was not at all to *her* liking. There is ever a fine snobbery among domestics. To serve two mistresses instead of one! *Ma foi!* the thing savored of the bourgeoisie. Suzanne's arguments were voluble ones. She laid the matter in all unbiased fairness before the chef; the second man was called in consultation, a footman or two included. An evil orgy of glib phrase and unbelievable malice! The next day there was a general exodus of all the servants Paddy had brought with her to the Continent.

Charlotte had not been educated to any practical considerations. Luxuries were to her simply necessities. The little inconveniences that resulted from the shortage of domestics combined with her hurt pride to give her some very uncomfortable weeks. So absolutely dependent had she been upon Suzanne that for a while she floundered about helplessly,

quite at sea as to the most rudimentary things. Preparing her own bath, finding her clothes, running ribbons in the dainty underclothes her maid had always ready to her hand, irked her beyond measure. She had many stormy scenes by herself, but eventually her indomitable will carried her through and she ceased to mind. She worked out a system as far as her own toilet went. The native chef had some good dishes to offer; the other Italian servants, substituted for the delinquents, helped her to acquire some colloquialisms. So, with youth's customary reaction, Charlotte soon forgot her own grievances. The mill-pond of her existence settled back to its former calm. Only in contemplation of Paddy did the old resentment quicken and stir.

Poor Paddy! If Charlotte had fourteen years of luxurious tradition to combat, Paddy had forty. Besides, Paddy had neither her daughter's will nor yet her steady fingers. She began to suffer a pitiable let-down in appearance. Her costumes, once the gossip of the Rue de la Paix, were too fragile to stand the rack of time. Like gossamer butterflies, they should have worked out their destinies in the fleeting hours, not in the dragging years. But Paddy went gaily on. She was forever leaving a bit of shredded lace or a tulle sleeve on some rose-bush or other, staining her loveliest silk on the mossy

benches, burning a hole in exquisite embroidery of registered value.

"*Vanitas vanitatum!*" she would answer lightly to Charlotte's daily remonstrances. It was not, however, the wanton destruction of the valuable that drew from Charlotte her protest, although it was on some such grounds she made her case. The deep grief, the real pain was for the loss of Paddy's beauty, the fading of her loveliness. Paddy's deterioration was in reality a matter of years, but as Charlotte looked back on it in later life it seemed to her to have come overnight, as if she had waked suddenly to the blur of a coarse hand that had marred forever the delicate tints of a loved picture.

Hendy, too, was saddened, and wandered about vaguely restless.

One day Paddy had come to luncheon in more conspicuous disarray than ever. Her negligée was torn, her hair untidy. Hendy had looked quickly away from her and had eaten in silence. After luncheon he took Charlotte aside.

"Can't you do something for Paddy?" he asked, awkwardly hesitant. "I thought you might help her mend a little, perhaps—"

The quick tears started to Charlotte's eyes. The two avoided looking at each other. Then, "I will

try," Charlotte said in a low voice and rushed to her room to hide the passion of her grief.

The next day she had, with a semblance of gaiety, offered to take on the responsibility of her mother's clothes. She, too, was learning the safeguard of flippancy. Paddy had slanted at her a strange look, then proceeded to empty all her bureau drawers in the middle of the floor.

Charlotte made valiant attempts for several weeks, to the discovery that the laying of patches on chiffon and silk was an art to challenge the deftest. She herself, totally unskilled, was of a deplorable clumsiness. She shut herself in her room, agonized and fumed, only to ruin the thing she was struggling so persistently to renovate. Even Hendy was obliged to admit the medley of patches presented for his inspection was *not* beautiful. They all pretended to lively amusement when Charlotte was eventually forced to cry a truce; but Paddy, with a shrewd guess at the part Hendy had played as instigator of the experiment, betrayed a certain sardonic satisfaction in its failure.

It was at this time the matter of Paddy's health became a problem to exclude every lesser consideration. She had terrible, racking headaches. With her usual perversity, however, she refused point-blank to summon a doctor, making fine sport of the medical profession—"bibble-babble" as she desig-

nated it; she discouraged blithely all inquiries and solicitations; in the end she refused to admit to her headaches at all. So, only in the bewildered pain of her eyes could Charlotte and Hendy read the truth of her suffering. She came eventually to shut herself away for days, finding the weight of their tacit sympathy intolerable. At such times there was nothing for Charlotte and Hendy but to haunt the streets and galleries, restless and unhappy. Poor, poor Paddy!

This tender, passionate pity that her mother's suffering aroused in her was to prove the source of an inspiration that lent to Charlotte's years in Florence a certain exaltation. She had wanted to paint, but her desire had become dimmed in the melancholy of communion with the past. When she was fourteen, Hendy had brought the matter to definite issue, arranging for lessons with an English teacher of reputation. Charlotte had been delighted; she expected to begin at once to paint pictures, to paint people. She had a remarkable sense of color harmony, loved to mix the pigments all up on her palette; but when it came to actual study of proportion and perspective, she was surprised, annoyed, and bored. Having never been brought down to definite application or schedule, she had no idea why certain tasks she did not fancy should be exacted of her. She was intolerant of

her teacher's criticisms and often dissolved into tears of rage. Hendy always accompanied her; had it not been for the whispered consultations with him back of her easel, each of the first lessons would have ended in a violent flare. Hendy gently pointed out that *all* artists had just such torturous beginnings. This was not enough, however, for Charlotte. It is doubtful if she could ever have restrained her impatience sufficiently to follow out her work, had not a quiet suggestion, dropped by Hendy, induced in her fertile brain the perception that in *this*, in her *art*, lay her opportunity to help Paddy. She quite naïvely traced Paddy's deterioration entirely to their loss of money. Very well! she would paint and make money for Paddy, thereby redeeming her health, her beauty, her youth. The inspiration was a blessed one, raising Charlotte above the annoyance of irking detail. Her whole attitude changed of a sudden; she saw herself entrusted with a great mission, the light of which shed an indefinable joy over everything.

She had no idea of money values; she knew only that the works of art about her were a matter of international contention. Imbued with this new idea, she set to work. It was the labor of love that made her life in Florence a happy one, the melancholy of sad awakenings lost in the luminous vision of high achievements.

So for seven years they lived, the three of them, an existence strangely concentrated, unbelievably free of outside responsibilities and attachments. They knew no one in Florence and Paddy had made it clear at the very beginning that they wished to know no one. The outside world seemed singularly remote, the threads of connection with it tenuous and unsubstantial. Philip, for instance, was there for them only in so far as he could create a disturbing ripple in the current of their own lives. Letters came at intervals, sullen, complaining. He had no money; he owed everybody; he was obliged to play poker to get by. His father refused to answer his letters; Uncle Howell Warren was obdurate to his pleas.

Charlotte's perception of her brother's plight in no way lessened her dislike for him. She ended by not reading his letters at all. She relied for her news upon casual discussions between Paddy and Hendy. Philip was eventually taken over by Cass Laurence's father, who saw in him a good influence for Cass. Paddy achieved a rare little grimace as she imparted this. Philip was spending all his vacations at the Laurences' country place on Long Island. The two boys entered Yale together. After that football was the prevailing motif, with now and then a variation on one Tim Welsh—"a Pittsburgh multi, splitting to get into the right set."

"He may stand me in good stead if ever I 'm chucked by the Laurences," Philip rambled on.

Charlotte showed herself indifferent to further details. Philip was *too* crude.

With Dolly's letters it was different. Dolly had promised to write every week and kept up valiantly for a succession of six. The notes were singularly childish, with their awkwardly formed letters forever running down hill till stopped by some kindly blot. Charlotte, whose own handwriting had developed, bold and definite, when she was still very young smiled tenderly over these attempts, but cherished them the more for their pathetic inadequacy. The news Dolly had to offer was negligible, but that mattered little to Charlotte. When the febrile little letters spluttered out entirely, she missed them intensely. That is—for a while. Then Dolly, too, sank into the remoteness that lay behind the purple Tuscan hills.

So Charlotte developed with the years. From a stormy, impetuous child there evolved a woman of a great and passionate tenderness, a tenderness that was all a yearning for the beautiful and the right. She was quick to know beauty, to hunt out mercilessly the sham and the false. She was unerring in her judgments of right and wrong. Right was right and wrong was wrong; in her creed were no ignoble compromises, no compacts of insincerities

and accommodations. She made no concession to circumstance; she allowed nothing for human frailty. Her deep dark eyes with their level brows carried the strength of inexorable conviction.

As the facts of life had come to her she accepted them simply; in her large conception of things there could be no mean interpretations. Life was beautiful; love, its transcendent experience, must be beautiful, too. If that beauty was tinged with sadness, it was but the exquisite penalty of supreme experience.

Supreme experience! Hendy felt a strange bewildered pain as he read in the deepening shadows of Charlotte's eyes her steady faith,—faith in those she cared for, faith in herself, faith in love and life. It was because of this faith she was content to let life take its course, with no straining at the future, no forcing of event. As a child she had wondered tremulously what was going to happen to her; that wonder had ceased in the philosophic calm of a great confidence. As Hendy watched her day after day gazing reflectively out into the soft range of afternoon twilight, he felt a dull ache that she could not always rest just so.

“You are happy, Mignon?”

“Ah, quite!”

But her assurances brought him only a factitious

comfort. Charlotte was nineteen and just beyond that purple haze of hills lay the world,—dangerous, destructive, interfering. The need to voice his restless fear was a poignant one.

“We must leave Florence some day,” he ventured in a low voice.

“Not yet!” she put in quickly, her eyes bright in his.

“Some day,” he persisted.

Her sigh seemed somehow the echo of his own.

“Well—perhaps, some day,” she murmured.

Then, together, they watched the valley beneath them grow heavy with the twilight shadows. The drenched gray of the olive-groves, the mauve of the wisteria, the somber purple of the Judas-tree fused with a sad reluctance, then deepened softly to a tonal harmony with the cypress gloom.

“Some day!” Charlotte repeated, as if to herself; then, raising her eyes to Hendy, she added with a smile: “You and Paddy and I!” and she pressed his hand between her two young strong ones to give him the comfort she felt somehow he was so helplessly seeking.

CHAPTER VI

IT was a peculiar contradiction of Charlotte's nature that, although quite content in her own sphere, no matter how restricted, she should enjoy so thoroughly "playing up" to the outside world when occasion offered. The visit of the Comtesse de Ferraud that spring, though fairly trivial in itself, was deeply significant in that it presented Charlotte with the opportunity of discovering herself as a distinct personality. So merged had her sympathies been with Hendy's, so subsidized her will by Paddy's, that she had been totally unaware of herself as an independent being. It was but natural, therefore, that in the sudden surprise of her discovery she should be carried away by her enthusiasm and the exhilaration of success.

Yet, in the beginning, she had asserted herself entirely for Paddy's sake. The comtesse en route from Rome to Paris had taken occasion to pay them a visit, "on a little matter of business," as she had wired. Charlotte and Hendy were planning a ride to Fiesole, tea in the little loggia below the monastery. Paddy had surprisingly asked that they postpone their excursion.

"The comtesse bores me; if I once went under I should never come up," she asserted positively.

Charlotte noted a quick interchange between Paddy and Hendy. She turned away abruptly. Money again! A savage resentment stirred against the Frenchwoman.

The comtesse arrived, coldly handsome, superbly gowned, inscrutable, reserved. Her reserve, however, was penetrated by one flash of frank astonishment as her eyes rested on Paddy, whose pathetic disarray was accentuated rather than covered by her voluble effusiveness. Paddy had never before appeared so utterly shoddy, so bewildered, so ill. The completeness of her disintegration could be read only through the eyes of one who had known her in the days of her Parisian triumphs some twenty years before.

A hot wave swept over Charlotte. Hendy turned quickly away. Even Paddy faltered. Then Charlotte stepped forward, with a quiet dignity, and gave her hand to the comtesse. They surveyed each other critically. There was that in Charlotte's perfect poise, in the tense calm of her great unflinching eyes that challenged attention. It was for *her* to make good in the comtesse's eyes; *her* laurels were Paddy's. The swift perception of this carried her forward in her first assertiveness. But after that it was the approval she read in the com-

tesse's eyes that led her on to a greater domination of the scene. It was the matter of the horse show all over again; with the applause of the crowd in her ears she would have dared any hurdle. She talked with a hard brilliance, a sophisticated worldliness, an accomplished versatility. Her French and Italian were perfect; her knowledge of books exhaustive. She had decided preferences which she was able to defend with a sharp wit. She gossiped, condoning or condemning without an instant's hesitation. Music, horse-flesh, what you will—she was there to meet the comtesse every time.

The comtesse was coldly amused. Paddy kept chuckling to herself and nodding approval. Hendy was nervously ill at ease. But Charlotte talked on and on with a mordacity of comment, a subversiveness, a daring that carried conviction through the very force of its incongruity.

"You are young to be so sophisticated," the comtesse murmured.

Charlotte's eyes met Hendy's for one penetrating second. They smiled at each other.

Hendy understood only too poignantly the hard show of Charlotte's worldliness, with its fine charity of purpose, but he could still be fearful of the factitious exhilaration it was capable of producing. He was infinitely relieved when the comtesse rose to go.

Charlotte admitted to a genuine regret that the visit was over; she had enjoyed her success.

"Your daughter is a beautiful guaranty, Patricia," the comtesse had said in parting. "If I can be of service any time in Paris—"

Charlotte's eyes showed the glow of a suppressed excitement. That night as she stood before her dressing-table, her quickened perception told her the comtesse had spoken the truth. She saw herself as if for the first time, and knew that she was beautiful. The deep dark eyes with their level brows, the mass of hair piled high, the olive skin with its pulse of throbbing color, the compressed line of the red lips—She studied her image carefully with the artist's instinct of line and color. Her orange negligée, draped tightly about her, accentuated the slenderness of waist and hip, but the breadth of the shoulders imparted to the whole figure the graceful strength of superb vigor. Her beauty was in its essence the beauty of youth; her joy in its possession was the joy of youth. She gazed at herself with a rapt eagerness. Then suddenly the vivid image in the glass blurred to another image, drab, worn, pathetic, Paddy as she had come forward to greet the comtesse. With a dry little sob, Charlotte covered her face and turned away. Paddy, too, had once been young and beautiful and confident. Before the intolerable lesson of this, Charlotte's pride broke. But the

passionate love that swept her at the image of Paddy's faded beauty was great enough to save her faith. Love was life and so could defy the slow stain of time. Beauty and success—they mattered little, after all. Charlotte, however, was not yet old enough to accept that fact with resignation. Her sobs, as she crumpled on her bed, were those of youth's protest immemorial.

CHAPTER VII

TWENTY-TWO trunks, a diversity of Scotch-plaid bags confessing golf sticks and tennis rackets, a number of generous hampers, a portable ice-chest, three or four maids, two valets—As Hendy watched the caravan unload he shook his head ruefully. There was no mistake this time. The great world—dangerous, destructive, interfering—had broken through the ring of purple hills at last. The courier came up and touched his hat.

“Mr. Laurence sent the baggage direct to Paris,” he volunteered.

Hendy smiled. “These, then,” he said, indicating the impedimenta, “are merely accessories?”

The idea amused him. Twenty-two trunks! He counted them again as they lay there at odd angles all over the courtyard. Yet the baggage, the *real* baggage had gone direct from Genoa to Paris! The strangeness of this glimpse into a world that had once been his own world brought home sharply to Hendy the utter isolation of the life they had been leading in Florence. Hendy had n’t seen

a trunk for seven years. The sight of a railway ticket, he felt sure, would have reduced him to nervous panic.

He wandered aimlessly in and out among the heaps of trunks. He was beginning to resent their intrusion bitterly, realizing they would of necessity force a decision that he had been avoiding weakly ever since the visit of the Comtesse de Ferraud a month before. Hendy had expected the excitement of that visit to result for Charlotte in the restlessness of dissatisfaction, in the desire for opportunity to exercise those powers she had so suddenly discovered as hers. But instead, she had reacted to a tense, strange sadness that was all a passionate clinging to the old life. There was a wistful tenderness in her dark eyes, which, often as they rested on Paddy, seemed heavy with the weight of unshed tears. Hendy had heard Charlotte's choked sobs the night the comtesse left. He had wanted so intensely to go to her, but, with a dull ache in his own heart, he could have offered scant comfort. So he had stayed away and lost his chance, for, after the first wild outpouring, Charlotte's grief had settled to a suppressed restraint through which he found himself unable to penetrate. Uneasy speculations, vague misgivings filled him.

There were many things Charlotte should know, things the telling of which he had put off too long.

It was impossible to guess what trend of thought the comtesse's visit had started in her fertile mind, what tormenting doubts and tragic questionings had been quickened. A dangerous period for her to be thrown back upon herself, upon her thoughts, her moods, her turbulence. Her recoil from the world, that he would have welcomed so eagerly a little while before, became now a matter of nervous worry. Charlotte must be roused from the melancholy of too deep thinking. There seemed but one logical solution, a trip somewhere. The responsibility of suggestion was quite obviously his.

A little run over to Paris! A couple of weeks in England! It seemed quite simple. Yet—Hendy vacillated, with all the while the complete sense of the weakness so fundamentally his. He was utterly incapable of decisive action.

Then had come the telegram from Buchanan Laurence, followed two hours later by this caravan, each trunk of which seemed to Hendy a malignant reminder of his own failure to do the thing he should have done. Of course the Laurences would ask Charlotte to return to Paris with them and of course Charlotte must go. There was a chance the ultimate decision in regard to that might fall to him. Charlotte as yet had no sense of anything beyond her present pleasure at seeing Dolly once more. In the excitement of that she had been able to lose

the gloom that had been besetting her so strangely of late, a fact that pointed to Hendy more poignantly than anything else the efficacy of outside diversion. Yes—Hendy roused himself with a sigh from his reflections—there was no question about it; Charlotte must go on to Paris with the Laurences.

Paddy put in an opportune appearance at this point of his reflections.

“A perfect beauty, but a perfect nincompoop!” she pronounced decisively.

“She’s lovely,” Charlotte whispered to him as she joined him later, and the warm pressure of her hand established once more the current of their sympathy.

Dolly was, indisputably, lovely. Fragile, golden-haired, with her translucent eyes, her fine transparency of skin, she seemed beyond the commonplace of ordinary reality. A fantasy of rainbow mists, perhaps! Or an elusive wisp of cloud!

Charlotte confided to Hendy that when Dolly was about, she herself felt like a great big Ethiopian. Dolly was singularly uncommunicative, a luminous smile her one revelation. It was to that smile Charlotte played up now with an even greater zest than she had played to the comtesse’s skepticism. To win Dolly’s approval—*there* lay her joy! That she scored with Buchanan Laurence was of negligible importance by comparison, although an occasional

broadside of his did bring a flush of surprised pleasure to her cheeks.

Paddy played the part of hostess with fitful flashes of her old brilliancy, provoking a camaraderie under the easy spell of which the most trivial activity took on the nature of a tremendous lark. Random parties were continually being put into effect; excursions cropped up overnight like mushrooms. A new Florence was discovered and gave up its secrets,—for a consideration, of course. The Teatro Salvini was duly exploited, the food at Bonciani's sampled, liqueurs drunk at the Piazza Vittorio Emmanuele. Then there were the races on the Cascine, and always and forever a game of *pallone* to be watched and staked. Buchanan was insistent on a visit to the Villa Palmieri, another to the monastery of Certosa. Florence was spelled to him entirely in terms of the Decameron and the golden liquid of Val d' Ema.

Dolly suffered herself to be lured into a gallery occasionally. She drooped prettily about, emitting a soft sigh now and then, whether of emotion or fatigue it is impossible to say. She picked a rose in the garden and murmured something inaudible but nevertheless wistfully appropriate when Charlotte took her out to inspect the Rowdy's grave. She toyed with Old Man Blink, who, heavy with the weight of years, showed himself crabbed and resent-

ful. Dolly, however, had but the gentlest reproach for his ill temper. Only in Paddy's presence did Dolly's lovely calm forsake her. Paddy's joy in bewildering the poor little thing was an unholy one. She questioned her, she tormented her, she made faces at her till Dolly was reduced to a white panic. Hendy was forced to intercede eventually and saw to it from that time on that Paddy and Dolly were never left alone together.

But all in all, the party made for a jolly good time. To Charlotte the renewal of her early friendship was a tender, beautiful thing that was to restore her, for a while at least, to a bright optimism. Still, the definite suggestion that she go with the Laurences to Paris brought a momentary stir of the old homesickness.

"No, no!" she protested sharply and held Hendy's hand tightly in hers as if in a passionate plea for support.

Hendy met her eager eyes with a brave show of casual indifference.

"A few weeks, Mignon. You should know Paris—"

Charlotte's wide eyes were full of a tense fear. Hendy was unable to bear the strange light of them. He turned away.

"We might join you in a fortnight," he added weakly. "Paddy and I—"

"Ah!" Charlotte breathed deeply with the sudden relief of decision, "I will wait and go with you"

What she wanted was a little respite, a chance to think, to get her present experience in the proper perspective before rushing on to more. Experience, after all, lay not in actual event, but the nice adjusting of event through the balance-wheel of thought.

"I will wait and go with you!" Charlotte told Hendy. But she had forgotten Paddy was still to be dealt with,—Paddy, who now with a certain wicked delight reduced her once more to the status of a little girl, blithely disposing of her without question or consultation. She was to go to Paris with the Laurences; that was all there was to it. So when Hendy deserted her at a crisis in which she was attempting to assert herself, she gave in, confused and pained.

A wire from Paris precipitated matters. Buchanan was obliged to leave at once. A bustle and rush, a confusion of maids and bags! One last look over the parapet, down the long valley of the Arno, one last tweak of Old Man Blink's ears, a quick exchange of banter with Paddy, and Charlotte found herself with the others crowding into the carriage that was to take them to the station. Hendy went with them, a little more restrained than usual, a little more detached.

Charlotte's eyes were hard and bright as they met his; the good-by at the station was a formal one. Then suddenly her defiance faded out. As she looked back at him, standing there on the platform, he seemed so tired and discouraged, a real pain in his gray eyes. With a swift, sharp vision of that early morning they had entered Florence so many years before, she had rushed back to him and thrown her arms about his neck. His eyes lightened with a quick pleasure as he held her to him and kissed her. Charlotte's own eyes were too suffused with tears to notice the peculiar glances exchanged between Dolly and Buchanan as they hurried her to the waiting train.

CHAPTER VIII

SO from the tempered yellow glow of Florence Charlotte was precipitated into the white glare of Paris, the Paris of the Ritz, the fashionable restaurants, the theaters, the Paris of American plutocracy. The Comtesse de Ferraud had been communicated with and extended a cordial welcome. Charlotte was provided with a maid, her wardrobe replenished. Then the whirl began. There happened to be a number of Americans of the Laurences' own set in Paris, supplemented by the comtesse with an anomaly of French. They dined brilliantly and lunched and danced. They ran into old friends and made a hundred new ones. They rushed from one thing to another and were in a perpetual state of dressing and going on somewhere else. The party became the center of attraction to camera men and reporters, who followed them everywhere in noisy confusion like so many camp followers. Dolly, as one of America's richest heiresses, was the focal point of interest to a dozen young French counts and as many ambitious English mothers. People seemed not quite sure of Charlotte's standing.

A few recalled some of Paddy's former exploits. But, as to that, what did it matter? For, although Dolly's prospects and Buchanan's extravagance gave the party its prestige, it was Charlotte's brilliance that gave it distinction.

Charlotte was, as the comtesse had recognized at once, essentially continental. Unhampered by prejudice, unrestrained by conventions, she was able to achieve a breadth of view that was totally un-American. She was an exceptional linguist and possessed a vigor of expression that marked her at once as a dominating factor in any gathering. She was definite, incisive, subversive, yet never aggressive. Her frankness in discussion was amazing, but the steady clearness of her wonderful eyes disarmed all criticism. She barred no subject—indeed, why should she?—but a remark of ugly suggestion brought a scathing dismissal upon the offender. It had been for Paddy in her day to amuse, to shock, to startle; it was for Charlotte to control, with the force of her keen intellect, the vigor of her unlimited energy, the sharpness of her wit. She was brilliant and she was beautiful; small wonder, then, she was acclaimed the success of the hour.

It was a period of intoxication for Charlotte. Everything that was warm and sentient and eager within her quickened to a responsive glow. She

adored the crowded hours of bustle and excitement, of adulation and applause. She loved the conspicuous luxury, the extravagance of attention. The lights, the music, the throngs of people on the boulevards! Life took on the nature of a brilliant kaleidoscopic display that lacked entirely the third dimension of reality. Not a minute's respite for thought, not a second to pin impression down to fact! Even Dolly existed only as a pair of lovely blue eyes to smile into across a crowded dinner-table; a vague white presence to kiss goodnight. Paddy and Hendy, too! Shadowy figures of an existence that seemed far away!

Yet—it was for the moment when Paddy and Hendy were to return to her, take on again the flesh and blood of a substantial nearness, that she was essentially accumulating her experience. There had been erratic scrawls from Paddy, a daily letter from Hendy, calling to her attention a picture here, a statue there. But there was no time to hunt out the picture or the statue, nor yet to write the exhaustive epistles she was forever planning.

"Such a tumble of impressions!" she wrote. "I can only wait for you to dig me out. I count the days till you come. Plenty of time then, plenty of opportunities! O moments of blessed talk!"

Two days before Paddy and Hendy were booked to arrive Buchanan Laurence had planned a coaching

party out to Versailles. It was a gorgeous day, the sky a deep blue of intense calm. Charlotte was quieter than usual. Paddy and Hendy! In the very thought of them the confusion of her sensations began to settle to a steadier throb of happiness.

The party was a gay one, the chatter and laughter incessant. As the drag swung through the crowded streets it was greeted on all sides with a voluble enthusiasm, a lively curiosity. This woman or that was pointed out, gossip revived. Flowing veils, vivid parasols, extravagant costumes!—the horses consciously checked their nervous strength as if to display in slower progress the pageantry of their precious freight. A cheer went up from the bystanders as Buchanan Laurence tooled the coach around an ugly corner with neat precision.

Charlotte was on the box beside Buchanan. Her interest in horse-flesh was a genuine one and he knew it. A fine point in driving never escaped her. She loved the delicate response of the horses, their sensitive reaction. She loved it all, down to the smallest detail, the creak of the harness, the exhalation of steam from the brown, sleek bodies, the sway of the drag. As they swung out to the more open spaces she breathed deeply of the fresh morning air, as if to drink in still greater happiness. The pounding of the horses' hoofs echoed in her

brain. Paddy and Hendy! Paddy and Hendy! She smiled to herself in the satisfaction of a great content.

The day proved a vivid one; then in the evening they drove back through a twilight of soft shadows and conscious stillness.

After that Charlotte remembered nothing but the telegram that the light disclosed on her dressing-table. It was brief and to the point: Paddy had been called to the States on business; she and Hendy had sailed that morning from Genoa.

For a blank second Charlotte stared incredulous. Then as the words grouped themselves to a slowly apprehended meaning, she gave a sharp cry. A black curtain of homesickness shut down upon her with the weight of dread finality. It was as if Paddy and Hendy had been taken away from her forever. Her cry broke to strange gasping sobs that she struggled to suppress. Then with the violence of her old childish emotion she had thrown herself on the bed to a night of weeping and despair.

The cable that came ten days later announcing the safe arrival of the steamer in New York brought the first glimmer in the blackness of Charlotte's depression. Yet, those about her had no intimation of her misery. Buchanan and the comtesse had taken the matter quite casually. As for Dolly—well—how could Dolly be expected to understand, Dolly

who had never had a mother? Charlotte concealed her homesickness with an admirable self-possession. She was a little more hardly brilliant, her wit of a new mordacity. She began to see things as they were, to discriminate with a penetrating clearness. The glamour of Paris had faded to the grayness of a dawning disillusion, and she was lonely with the dull ache of a great loneliness for some one to talk to of her unhappiness.

A letter from Paddy had come, bringing a little artificial comfort. There had been some financial adjustments. "We are of a blessed affluence once more," Paddy wrote. "Spend, my dear, spend! 'T is the greatest of life's unwritten laws." A few lines from Hendy were attached. They were going to open the Newport house again, have it ready for Charlotte when she returned with the Laurences in the autumn. Then, later, they could all go back to Florence. Old Man Blink had stood the ocean voyage stoically. Paddy was buying quantities of new clothes—

Ah! there was that in Hendy's letter that really touched the well-spring of cheerfulness. Paddy with quantities of pretty clothes meant again the old Paddy, of graceful charm, of winsome loveliness. And an autumn in Newport at the old house! Charlotte attempted to tell Dolly something of her thoughts.

"Father says your house is badly out of repair," commented Dolly, with blue-eyed lucidity.

Charlotte smiled with amused indulgence.

"How long is it since you were there?" Dolly queried, still pursuing her practical vein. "How long were you in Florence?"

"Seven years!" answered Charlotte.

Seven years! She got the sweep of them as she spoke, with a fullness of longing to have them back. She closed her eyes to the luminous vista of the Arno valley in the purple haze of a fading light. But no! Dolly could never understand. Charlotte was thrown back once more upon herself and her loneliness.

The stage was well set for the arrival of Billy Dunscomb, who, with an intuition sharpened by a really fine love, was able to understand and give her the sympathy she craved. Charlotte was destined to be Billy's great passion and for a few mistaken weeks, warmed by the glow of his response to her need, she judged that she, too, had found her supreme experience. In reality it was but a phase, necessary to the maturing of her character, perhaps, but significant principally in the great crisis of her life that it precipitated.

Billy, Cassimir, and Philip arrived at Cherbourg on the *Wilhelm der Grosse* and came immediately to Paris. Charlotte looked for nothing from Philip

and got nothing, save one glance of shrewd appraisal of the particular sort of beauty she had attained with the years. Cassimir was too loud in his cordiality. But one glance into Billy's frank blue eyes and Charlotte realized she had found the friend she needed.

So it was to be Billy,—Billy with his brawn and good looks that had made him the most popular football star of his day; Billy with his square smile of ever ready sympathy; Billy with his unbounded, intense, unqualified adoration of her.

"You should never judge a man's morals from his own actions but from what he demands in his wife."

So Paddy had pronounced one day, with her usual glibness. Arbitrary, to be sure, but of a certain patness that characterized all of Paddy's random shots.

Judged so, young Billy Dunscomb was a paragon of virtue. For it was the fine uprightness of Charlotte, her straightforward moral honesty that was her strongest recommendation in his eyes. Billy's millions had made him the target for so many women of easy standards that it was remarkable he had any sense of discrimination left. It was decidedly to his credit, then, that he should react to a girl like Charlotte. His love for her endowed him with an unusual insight that enabled him to see, under the mask of hard, brilliant sophistication that she pre-

sented to the world, the tremulousness of the girl on the brink of new things. He saw her tender and yearning, eager and wistful, with a compelling loneliness in the darkening of her wonderful eyes. Though Billy was by no means clever ordinarily, his love now gave him penetration.

The thing was inevitable. Charlotte talked to him, as a child talks, on and on, with the glow of happy relief, with a great and beautiful assurance. She talked of Paddy and Hendy, of Old Man Blink, of the Rowdy's death, of Newport and Florence, of the seven years with their sweep of pensive experience, of her homesickness, her loneliness. And Billy listened kindly, the eagerness in his eyes subdued to meet the trust in hers.

Yes, the thing was inevitable. The stir of sympathy and the haunting solicitude of passion! Strange inconsequent blur of youth's emotions!

Philip began to take the matter for granted; the comtesse smiled approval. Buchanan Laurence made a broad sally or two. Dolly sought Charlotte out in the night watches and invited confidences. Charlotte was surprised at first and sought to explain. She ended by shrugging their banter away, putting it down in her mind as incidental and in very bad taste. She reacted to Billy the more as a result. The comforting warmth of understanding, the close intimacy of revelation, the glow of physical contacts

—yet Charlotte had no sense of an impending crisis until she found herself one night in Billy's arms, with a surprised acceptance of the fact as the only logical climax to their relation. She surrendered with a quiet joy. Billy held her to him and looked into her eyes. Then he kissed her with a deliberate passion that carried its message of throbbing intensity through every vein of her vibrant body. A tremulous joy took possession of her. In that first blur of her senses, the quiver of her fine nerves, she read the transcendent thing she had conceived as love. The warm reality of a vigorous passion she mistook for the exaltation of a spiritual affinity.

"Charlotte!" Billy murmured.

Her eyes opened to the urgency in his own and then closed again.

This time her lips sought his.

Love! Yes, this was love! And as she rested there in the warmth of close embrace she felt in her poor mistaken youngness that supreme experience was ecstatically hers.

CHAPTER IX

THEY were all booked for August at the Deauville races, a September of rustic reaction at Lord Ashburton's shooting-box in Scotland. Then, back to America in October! Billy was all for an early marriage in the autumn and Charlotte agreed simply, happily. She was happy, yet her happiness was of the strange unsubstantiality of a bewildering dream. She felt that only in the approving glint of Paddy's eyes, in the understanding pressure of Hendy's hand, could the experience attain the reality of splendid fact. So at the heart of her happiness was the old sick loneliness for those two so far away. October! Meanwhile August and September had to be covered with the least possible show of restlessness. She saw not so much of Billy, for they were a very busy party. He was thoughtful and gentle as ever, his ardor consciously held in check. But she warmed always to the light in his eyes, and took his kisses with a naïve pleasure.

The others had accepted the situation with a deal of jocosity. Having a pair of lovers among them added to the general zest; activities quickened.

With the cable of sanction from Paddy the need for secrecy was at an end. The newspapers pounced; the thing flared the length of two continents. Charlotte's picture was flaunted in every newspaper and periodical of Europe and America. Paddy's former triumphs were recalled, Billy's millions conspicuously dwelt upon. "Young millionaire and beautiful fiancée!" Charlotte was confronted with herself in every conceivable costume. One of the New York journals printed two vivid pictorial pages—"Around the clock with Miss Charlotte Baird." It was ridiculous; it was preposterous; it was indecent, but it *was* amusing. "Where under the heavens did they get it?" exclaimed Charlotte. But the thing was undeniably authentic. She awoke, she had her coffee, she read her paper, she was dressed by her maid—so it went, with graphic illustration, through every intimate detail of a busy day.

In a way the notoriety served its purpose, for Charlotte lost a little the sense of time. She was amused, excited. The idea of Paddy and Hendy likewise following the papers seemed to bring them closer. She could just hear Paddy's ridicule of certain press sentimentalities; she could see the hurt resentment in Hendy's eyes at some picture that failed to do her justice.

The Dunscomb millions! They had counted not

at all in Charlotte's choice. Gradually, however, the undue emphasis of them in the papers brought her a certain uneasiness. She read a new significance in Philip's awkward attempts at kindness, in the comtesse's solicitations. A master business coup,—so her Parisian friends interpreted the affair. Charlotte resented their attitude hotly. Even Dolly showed herself singularly practical in the discussion of town and country houses. Only Billy understood,—Billy and, of course, Paddy and Hendy.

Paddy had cabled her to buy her clothes in Paris, so Charlotte, under the comtesse's deft guidance, proceeded to indulge in an orgy of extravagance. The artistic in her responded to subtlety of hue and softness of texture. She adored each lovely thing, glowingly instinct with fragrance and light and beauty. But the fittings, the appointments, the consultations with costumier and modiste, though representing the very material and practical, made the crowded hours the more unreal to Charlotte, the more lacking in perspective. Time and tide were set at naught; night turned into day. Charlotte felt herself giddy with the whirl of events. Then by an accident fairly trivial of itself the turbulence of her mind was clarified to a cold, crisp lucidity of thought. It was as a chemical reaction that brings

out of clouded murk a sudden startling transparency. Charlotte emerged from the experience with a clear vision undimmed by the mist of circumstance.

Billy and the Comte de San Moritz had gone over to Havre to see to the disembarkation of some of Billy's horses entered at the Deauville races. The rest of the party were to follow in a week. One morning as Charlotte was breakfasting in her room the waiter had shown a sort of officious embarrassment as he handed her the morning paper. The man's peculiar attitude, the awkward way the sheet was folded, aroused Charlotte's suspicions at once. But she could control herself sufficiently to put the paper aside and eat her breakfast with a semblance of calm. Yet all the while there was growing within her the certainty that something very vital, perhaps very tragic, was about to happen to her. When her wants had been filled and the waiter dismissed, she picked up the paper quietly. Contact with the outside world was beginning to teach Charlotte the necessity for self-control. The old impetuosity was there, but held, for the moment at least, in the check of convention. The front of the sheet had been folded inside by some kindly menial below-stairs to save her the shock of the prominent head-lines. She stared at these a long time to get the full significance of their black dis-

tinctness. Then she settled herself in a chair and read the article slowly and thoroughly to the very end.

Billy Dunscomb was being sued for breach of promise by one Marguerita DeWitt, who had told her story to the reporters with tears in her blue eyes. She had been a telephone girl in a New Haven hotel. Ah! Marguerita sighed pensively at the thought of those happy innocent hours of switchboard activities! Then Billy Dunscomb had come and talked of love as the higher law. Marguerita showed a pretty reluctance at this point of her narration but suffered herself eventually to be led on to a charming frankness. She admitted she had lived with Billy his last two years in college, expecting, of course, their romance to reach the honorable climax of matrimony upon Billy's graduation. The poor girl's dismay upon discovering she was, after all, only a "bauble" to Billy was a terrible thing. She had thought of suicide.

Yes, Marguerita admitted wanly, she had gone on the stage at this time, but she was not happy in her work, for her outraged virtue cried out night and day for a reprisal. Then she had read of Billy's engagement in the paper, and the next thing she knew she was in Paris. She felt most keenly the mortification of all the publicity in which she had become

embroiled; *that* had been quite outside her calculation.

"Miss Charlotte Baird?"

Marguerita took her cue. She spoke of Charlotte in touching terms. Her reluctance to give pain to another woman was really a beautiful thing.

It made a nice story, one the press warmed to in all sentimentality. A lovely daughter of the people debauched by the hard-hearted scion of wealth! The reporters outdid themselves. Quite incidentally was it mentioned that several New York managers were vying with one another to secure the services of the charming lady in question. The absurdly high figures quoted go to prove philanthropy is not a lost art in theatrical circles. The little Marguerita was destined for a spectacular career behind the footlights.

"The girl young Dunscomb treated so shabbily! You remember she sued him. Yes, game little thing!"

"Outraged virtue has its own reward on Broadway!" So Paddy had pronounced once in regard to a case similar in point. A pretty idea this—the boards as a haven for broken hearts!

As Charlotte read the article she was conscious of nothing at first but a sickening sense of disgust. Then came the ironic perception of the farce of the

thing. The commercialization of a sordid entanglement; that was it. A case of blackmail with Billy the victim! But this perception pointed none the less the great fundamental wrong involved. In the unshrinking analysis of that wrong, as Charlotte now sat and faced it, she was to attain a steadied maturity, with capacity for fine thought and will to act.

She saw this episode of Billy's as indicating the general rottenness of a social order that took so for granted the immorality of its men. Virtue was a negligible quantity in the masculine equation. She realized that she herself had known all along, vaguely but none the less surely, that such wretched entanglements as this existed; her refusal to face openly the problem of them had constituted a sort of condonement, the more culpable for being indifferent. Charlotte did not condemn Billy in particular; she saw him merely as a victim of a class tradition which she herself by wilful detachment had been helping to uphold. It was against the evil back of the whole miserable order of things that she reacted, the evil that was in its essence only weakness. In the proud strength of her clearer vision Charlotte could be intolerant of that weakness. Sex! It came down to that every time. Sex and indulgence! She saw it as unnecessary, objectionable, contemptible. She saw, too, that the attrac-

tion Billy had possessed for her had its roots in that same weakness. A physical passion, and she had thought it love! Charlotte was Paddy's own child; she did not mince matters, seek justification for herself in fine phrases. She diagnosed her feeling for Billy and condemned it ruthlessly. By the light of her new penetration the whole scheme of their Paris life now took on a glaring grotesqueness. False, out of all proportion and perspective, vulgarized by the most intolerable interpretations of relationship! The comtesse, Buchanan, Philip, Cassimir—she seemed to find herself suddenly in a world of clumsy intrigue, of sneaking assignation.

But as she sat there, facing ugly facts, there came to her by a peculiar sequence a certain thankfulness as of a sordid danger escaped. A strange quiet, a mellow peace slowly pervaded her senses. She closed her eyes and felt herself back in Florence with Paddy and Hendy. She felt an extraordinary accession of tenderness that brought the infinite relief of a recovered security. Paddy and Hendy! Blessed sanctuary from the world's evil! She smiled quietly to herself. Then, tired and worn, she sank into a reverie that was all a luminous vision of a future painted with the pigments of the warm glowing years she and Paddy and Hendy had spent together in the remoteness of the purple Tuscan hills. They would go back; yes, they would go

back to claim again the old happiness and wonder of tender intimacy, the understanding of a great love. A few tears gathered in Charlotte's eyes, but they were the tears of content.

As Charlotte dressed for dinner that evening she was conscious that her morning's struggle had left its mark. She was very white, a deep, lustrous calm in her dark eyes. By a strange accident she had dressed herself in a slinky Paquin gown of dull black, that lent to her slender figure a new power of dignity, a peculiar aloofness. It was this very aloofness, this fine poise of a detached self-sufficiency that had carried Charlotte triumphant through the activities of that wretched day.

Dolly had come to her at noon, excited and flushed. But one look into Charlotte's quiet eyes, and the feeble little joke she had planned at Billy's expense died in utterance. Philip had watched her at lunch with an ugly narrowness; the comtesse's lips were set in a straight thin line and there was speculation in her eyes as they followed Charlotte's every move. Buchanan cleared his throat noisily a dozen times preliminary to a break into casual discussion of the matter, but—hang it all!—courage failed him. He, too, was obviously disconcerted. Incidental as such scandals were in the general run of things, these people could still be uneasy before the incalculable moves of a fine uprightness.

Charlotte carried out her day's engagements with careful detail. Cassimir had mentioned in the late afternoon that he expected Billy on the midnight. It was of this Charlotte was thinking as she sat down to rest for a moment before going downstairs. Yes, as things had straightened out in her mind, it was all quite simple and direct. No bitter accusations nor dramatic sentimentalizing; only a straightforward statement that she had been mistaken in her feeling. To-morrow was Thursday. On Saturday she could catch the steamer at Cherbourg. In the contemplation of that end, she lost all sense of the irking details that awaited her meanwhile. She rose at last, a little rested. Dinner with the Comtesse de San Moritz was achieved not too unpleasantly. Then they went on to a theater. As the party entered the lobby there was a buzz of whispered excitement, a rush and press in their direction. But the curious looks and murmured comment affected Charlotte not at all. She passed through the throng, the very pride of her dignity stamping as cheap and incidental the sensational show. She seated herself in the front of the box unflinchingly.

She remembered nothing distinctly about the rest of the evening, except that they had gone on somewhere after the play. Then she was sitting in her room with closed eyes, trying to summon the energy

to get undressed. She had told her maid not to wait for her; she was glad of that. The hotel seemed very still, as she sat there. She rested in the quiet of it for a long time. Yes, it ought to be quite simple. She had been mistaken in her feelings. She would tell Billy that and he would understand. Then, suddenly conscious of a step outside, she rose quickly. The knock in the stillness sounded hollow. It was Billy; she knew it before he entered.

"I should n't have come up," he said as, flushed and excited, he took both her hands. "But I couldn't wait until to-morrow. Charlotte, you don't know what I've been through. I've been waiting hours in the Deauville station—and then the trip on the train. And the worst of it is I have nothing to say. It's all damned true, except my promising to marry her. That sort of thing wouldn't matter to other women, but to you—you are different and I was afraid. Charlotte, tell me, tell me—it *can't* make any difference." So poor Billy poured out his complaint and as he did so Charlotte came to realize the task before her would not be so easy as she expected. He had tried to take her in his arms as he talked, but she held him back gently. He saw in this her opposition and burst out anew in a passionate pleading. Charlotte was *his* by right of his great love, his need—

Charlotte was passionately sorry for him, but her

resolution held for all her pity. She drew him at last down beside her on the divan and in a low voice tried to explain something of her feeling. She stated her case clearly. It was not that she could n't forgive him the scandal; it was simply that the affair had opened her eyes to the perception of her own mistake. She did not *love* him in the best sense of love. Her explanation was a lucid one, but poor Billy, in the confusion of his emotions, saw only that he was losing her and in his stupidity still harped on the wretched fluke of his scandal.

"It is *not* that," Charlotte repeated wearily, but Billy continued in his blundering way to make of that the vital issue. Then, as he talked on, incoherent in his eagerness, he was to strike the death-blow of his own cause by the strangest of accidents.

"You have no right to throw me over for that," he cried desperately. "Those things go on everywhere and people condone them. You, yourself—look—look at Paddy and Hendy—"

There was a confused second of tragic illumination. Charlotte gave a sharp cry and put up her hands in a mute plea for pity. Then she swayed and, with a little whimper of pain, buried her face in her hands. The suffering of that cry, sounding as it did the depths of her ignorance, showed Billy the cowardly thing he had done. Contrite, compassionate, he knelt by her side, the sense of his own

irrevocable loss merged strangely with the agony of hers. He put his arms about her, with a yearning tenderness, then drew her hands from her face. She let him. But in her white repose as she turned toward him he found neither the passion nor the grief he had expected, only the calm of an overwhelming prostration.

PART III

PART III

CHAPTER X

THE following Saturday Buchanan Laurence took Charlotte to Cherbourg and put her on the steamer for New York. Buchanan was sorry for the girl. Of course, she'd acted like a damn fool, the Dunscomb millions forfeit to her senseless pride. Still, such complete indifference to the power of money compelled Buchanan's admiration. The women with whom he had to do were of a different order. This new species tickled his curiosity. Hang it all, he was rather glad Charlotte had n't tied up with Billy! What appreciation could a cub like that have of a woman like Charlotte? So, it was Buchanan who had stepped in and saved Charlotte the harsh contacts inevitable in such a situation. It was Buchanan who had settled with Philip in his drunken insolence; it was Buchanan who had met the comtesse's close-lipped demand for "certain financial guarantees."

The break had thrown the whole party into a state of seething exasperation. As no one knew the exact truth of the matter, speculations ran counter,

with the result of high words, nervous sarcasms, restless irritability.

Billy had come and gone—that had been determined at the hotel office—but, otherwise, no details were forthcoming. No one could be sure of anything except that there was more back of the business than the trifling interference of the DeWitt creature. But, whatever the disturbance, Charlotte was a silly fool. *That* was indisputable, the one point of which our party could make common ground.

Charlotte had followed Buchanan's advice and kept to her own rooms. She saw no one but Dolly, who fluttered in and out making feeble little sallies by way of putting Charlotte quite at her ease. The conversation, however, invariably resolved itself into an exchange between Dolly and Charlotte's sprightly French maid, who, with true pointer instincts, quivered to the faintest scent of scandal in the air.

It is a question whether immediate contact with the ugly opposition of Philip and the comtesse might not have proved of tonic benefit to Charlotte. But, as it was, the two days of idle waiting dragged an interminable length, the first dull calm of her prostration deadening slowly to the intolerable weight of a bitter condemnation. It was as if everything young and bright and warm and sentient within her

had perished miserably in the cold grip of her disillusion. Charlotte had no sense of protest, of pain, of sorrow. She knew only that she felt cold and hard and old.

At the end of the third day she found herself on the steamer at Cherbourg, saying good-by to Buchanan, who assumed all the fine airs of a knight errant, very tender of his rescued lady. That there was any incongruity in her immediate return to Paddy and Hendy had never occurred to Charlotte. The force that was drawing her to them was so resistless that she had never thought of any other contingency. She was going back to them, that was all there was to it. But she could still question in a detached, impersonal way the motives that were actuating her. Why was she going back? And again she spared herself not at all in dispassionate analysis. She was going back to inflict upon Paddy and Hendy the hard rod of her condemnation, to wrest a certain bitter satisfaction from her own relentlessness. Relentlessness! It was that in her before which she stood fearful and surprised. She had thought that once by herself on shipboard the crust of her hardness would give way to the old emotional violence. She had wanted to weep wildly, to be shaken by a passion of protest that would work itself out eventually in some order of compromise, by which

she could still piece together in a pattern not too grotesque the shattered bits of her faith.

It was a stormy trip. Heavy seas swept to a heavier sky-line, and always that moan of the ship as it struggled against the black rush of the waters! Storm and stress, conflict and violence! Charlotte with youth's trend to the dramatic longed for just that in her own soul; and, instead, she was forced to make terms with the dullness of her strange calm, the monotony of her hard unyielding.

She was indefatigable in her activities, tramping the decks unceasingly. People went out of their way to be kind to this girl, with her abrupt manner, her unflinching dark eyes. They knew her story and whispered about it among themselves. Charlotte met all advances steadily; it was not in her nature to shirk. But, for all her daily intercourse with them, her fellow passengers were as unsubstantial to her, as indistinct of outline as the passing figures of a pageant. In one instance only did she get the sharp sense of individuality. Roger Canby! She heard his story from a nice old lady who recounted it with a sad satisfaction. Roger Winthrop Canby was an artist of the *greatest* promise. Poor, but one of Boston's finest old conservative families! His father had died when Roger was a boy and the poor dear mother had struggled and agonized ever since to educate her son along artistic lines. She had

sent him to Paris that summer at a great sacrifice to herself. Then, hardly launched in his activities there, he had received a cable that his mother was dead. A very sad tale, to be sure. Charlotte admitted its pathos in spite of her reaction from the sentimental rendering of it. Then one day on the top deck she saw a youth looking out over the turbulent expanse of waters, a bewildered sadness in his eyes. She knew him at once as the hero of the old lady's story. She hesitated a second as she passed him, the old protective instinct astir within her. So lonely and desolate and questioning he seemed! But as he turned to her pause, there was something in his timid grace, in his tempered restraint and the fine quality of his detachment that brought her a sharp pang. Hendy! She swung quickly about and with averted eyes continued her walk. Yes, there was something in him that suggested Hendy. Her sudden pity died on the instant. Strange as it would seem, it was of Hendy that Charlotte had begun to realize herself the more intolerant. Paddy's sin was the sin of perversity, but Hendy's sin was that of a miserable weakness. In the hardness of her own strength Charlotte felt herself capable of inflicting the utmost cruelty upon that weakness.

So in the steady accumulation of her bitterness the long days and nights of the trip worked to an end. The last day out Charlotte encountered Roger again.

He looked at her with a shy recognition, but she passed him by. After all, how much more tragic her own home-coming than his!

She telegraphed at once from New York to Newport, deliberately naming a later train than the one she intended to take. A petty subterfuge, but she could not endure the thought of Hendy meeting her, the fine quiet of his eyes quickened with the joy of a recovered happiness—a joy for which she could have now only a harsh impatience.

Her deception achieved the desired end; there was no one at the Wickford dock to meet her. She took a taxi home through streets that awakened no thrill of recognition. Newport seemed strangely unfamiliar, coldly alien. She reached the house at just half-past four; a surprised footman let her in. Tea on the terrace! She would have known it without being told. She made her way into the drawing-room, took a cursory look around, then let her eyes rest listlessly on the view disclosed through the French windows. How she had loved that stretch of lawn with pond and ocean beyond! She heard voices outside, and shivered involuntarily. Then she stepped quietly out on the terrace.

Hendy saw her first and rose quickly, but the happy surprise in his eyes faded on the instant to a dull blank of pain as Charlotte, with an almost

aggressive indifference, put out her hand. Their eyes met; then Hendy turned away. Hendy had guessed the truth. Paddy, meantime, all a flutter of incoherence, had jumped up, clattering a cup and saucer to the ground. It was a part of her nice irony that she should choose this moment of obvious crisis for a particularly effusive embrace and an extravagance of endearments. Charlotte disentangled herself from her mother's clinging arms, with a sharp sense of being put at an unfair disadvantage. Then, taking her hat off, she seated herself at the table.

"I'll have some tea, Paddy," she said coldly.

"Dear, dear me, I forgot!" cried Paddy, blithely, and, seating herself with many apologies for formalities overlooked, proceeded to brew the demanded tea.

"No cream, no lemon, no sugar, no rum!" she half-intoned as she prepared the cup. "Spartan—yes that's what you are, Charley, Spartan to the finish! Have a cigarette, my child?"

"No, thank you; I don't smoke," answered Charlotte, curtly.

Paddy wagged her head impishly as she inhaled her own cigarette.

"Just fancy, Hendy; the infant does n't smoke. Paris has evidently done nothing for her. I should n't be a particle surprised to find that she

still believes in God and—” Paddy paused just long enough to run her last point home more slyly, “those ridiculous old ten commandments.”

A cold, stubborn anger fastened on Charlotte, as Paddy’ mocking eyes probed her own. She saw that her mother, too, had guessed the truth and was making sport of her as in the old days. But in the old days the relief of tears would have come to her; now she could only sit there in grim resentment. Hendy began hurriedly to question her about the voyage, but Paddy interrupted with her usual suddenness of veer.

“So you’ve broken your engagement!”

“Yes,” Charlotte said.

Paddy narrowed her glinting eyes. “It can be mended!” she commented.

“It will never be mended!” Charlotte brought out with conviction. She could meet Paddy on the open ground of direct opposition. “It will never be mended,” she repeated.

Paddy’s anger flared for a fitful second. “Because a woman of the streets, a cocotte, sees fit to get herself in the lime-light is no excuse at all for you to get sentimental and raise a beastly row—”

Charlotte faced her mother.

“It was n’t over the cocotte that I made the beastly row, as you so delicately express it,” she said

with cold deliberation. "Billy told me a few simple truths, that was it."

"He did n't!" put in Paddy, her momentary anger lost in sudden impish delight. "Then Billy's no gentleman. A gentleman, Charley, never tells a lady simple truths—"

Hendy had come forward now, nervous, uncertain. "Don't, Paddy!" he protested. Then he turned to Charlotte. "Charlotte," he said in a low voice.

Charlotte turned to him without hesitation; the mute pleading in his eyes died out before the level indifference of hers.

"Of course I realize I've been a fool," she brought out in even tones.

"Hey, diddle diddle!" cried Paddy, throwing up her hands in mock confusion. "The cat and the fiddle—"

"The worst of it is," Charlotte continued, "I shall probably go on being a fool—"

"The cow jumped over the moon," chanted Paddy. "The little dog laughed to see such sport—"

"I shall go on being a fool," Charlotte repeated, "because I shall always go on believing in something, if it's only—" She turned to Paddy now with a bright hard smile—"those ridiculous old ten commandments."

Paddy, feeling herself included in the conversation once again, gave a particularly entrancing smile as she finished up her lay with a fine feeling for dramatic climax, "And the dish ran away with the spoon!"

Charlotte turned and picked up her hat. "It will be easier for all of us, perhaps, if we drop the matter here," she said. "What time is dinner?"

"Seven," Hendy answered in an uncertain tone.

Paddy's eyes glowed and glinted as they followed Charlotte to the door. But she could not let her go without one more flippant goad.

"Have a cigarette, darling child?" she asked with parrot-like pertness, again proffering her cigarette-case.

"No," answered Charlotte.

"Spartan through and through!" Paddy dropped to Hendy in all sageness, and then wound up inconsequently:

"And the dish ran away with the spoon!"

CHAPTER XI

THE note of impish flippancy, of teasing malice struck by Paddy in that first interview was to prove the dominant note of her attitude toward Charlotte in the months that followed. If Charlotte had endowed herself, as censor of her mother's sin, with any heroic qualities, a few days of Paddy's sportive treatment were sufficient to point her mistake. Not that Charlotte had ever expected Paddy to play conventionally the rôle of the repentent Magdalene, but she had taken for granted quite artlessly that her own stand against the wrong was of a sufficient dignity to insure it an impressive respect. Instead, she found herself subjected to absurd belittlements that robbed her of every claim to the recognition that should have been properly hers. Paddy worried her; Paddy tormented her; Paddy chivied her. Paddy sought her out effusively, whereas, in the old days of her ineffable adoration of Paddy, Paddy had let her alone. It was as if Paddy were forever seeking a weak point in the armor of Charlotte's hard intolerance through which she might hope to probe a

nerve. At times she assumed an attitude of meek dependence on Charlotte, calling her in consultation in regard to this or that. The gross misconduct of one of the maids, for example! She showed herself eager for talks of an intimate nature; with downcast eyes she asked advice. Then again the lightning of her ridicule would flare out and play over Charlotte with lambent tongues of mockery. In the end Charlotte discovered that only by a consistent aggressiveness could she hope to make a stand against Paddy's insidious trickery. A new metallic sound crept into Charlotte's voice; a hard defiance showed in her eyes. She was brusque; she was intolerant; she was cynical.

By an accident of perverse circumstance, although it was Paddy who provoked in Charlotte this new destructive phase, it was Hendy who was essentially the victim of it. Whereas Paddy's attacks put her on her mettle, Hendy's passive acceptance of her edicts aroused only contempt. The look of subdued pain that became a part of his gray eyes, the apologetic quaver of his voice, the gentleness of his self-effacement wrought to Charlotte's harsher intolerance, developing in her as well an unexpected cruelty that could take mean advantage of a weakness so ingenuously exposed.

They met, the three of them, as they had always met, at luncheon, at tea, at dinner. They talked of

people and books and paintings. Paddy did most of the open talking, with Charlotte to pull her up, now and then, on facts. Hendy had occasional ideas which he consistently lost track of before the hard gaze of Charlotte's dark eyes and the clearness of her logic. An incisive demand that he state his reasons for one preference or another was the signal for the complete disintegration of all his forces of argument. It was pathetic, it was tragic; but Charlotte with all the arrogance of youth's presumption not once relented.

In the matter of her painting Hendy was made to feel most pointedly the outsider. He had fitted up in preparation of her coming a studio on the top floor, giving it the most careful thought. She had taken possession two days after her arrival without a word of comment or a murmur of appreciation. She began to paint diligently, not with the old vision of high achievement for another's sake, but in the vain hope of creating something beautiful and tender to soften the harsh outlines of her unhappiness. She developed a new surety of touch, an accuracy of line. She would paint indefatigably, hopefully, for hours at a stretch. Then one slight brush stroke, a deeper shadow, and the picture would be discarded, placed against the wall, to exist only as a reminder of another dead inspiration.

Hendy strolled in occasionally. He saw the

marked improvement in her technique and told her so, but she treated his comments as incidental. She never worked when he was there, but would sit quite still as he wandered about smoking a restless cigarette. Very soon his visits ceased entirely.

So the days passed. As in the years of their Florentine existence, they lived a life singularly free of outside contacts. Charlotte saw nobody but Paddy and Hendy and the servants: she scarcely ever read a newspaper. Then in December the Laurences and with them Billy Dunscomb returned from Europe. Paddy had impudently waved a sheet of Sunday newspaper in Charlotte's face and Charlotte found herself confronted all too closely with a big picture of Billy. She pushed the paper aside impatiently and went on with her own reading. Then she thought of Dolly.

"When did they dock?" she asked.

"Yesterday," answered Hendy.

Then suddenly the words Paddy was stringing together in the haste of headlong curiosity began to take on meaning. A mumble, a mutter of blurred conning, a chuckle, with the salient points of fact as milestones by the way!

William Dunscomb had at last agreed to a financial settlement with Miss Marguerita DeWitt, the poor girl he had so woefully wronged in his college days.

It came down to that in the essence. Then, a sudden slue! Ah! "Miss Charlotte Baird, the beautiful young society girl—" Paddy looked up and gave Charlotte an inimitable little wink. Then, "*Ma foi!* they're after me again!" she chuckled. "Patricia Warren—hum—ha! No, they're wrong there. That was at Deauville, not Longchamps. He was n't a duke, only a count, and I never could stand the creature, anyway. Really, these post mortems are too absurd. Dead fruit of fugitive years. That's something you'll escape, Charley, because you're a good woman—Ah! Now, what's this?"

Paddy's incoherence clarified on the instant. She sat up perfectly straight and read out with a ringing distinctness:

"It is stated on good authority that the quarrel between Mr. Dunscomb and Miss Baird has been made up. Their marriage is expected to take place in the early spring."

There was a second's stillness as Paddy finished. Charlotte had had all through Paddy's frivolous commentaries the sense of an expected climax. Paddy had known from the beginning what was coming, so Charlotte judged shrewdly, and took immediate action on the suspicion aroused.

Paddy's eyes finally came around to her daughter and she gave her a smile of piercing sweetness.

"That must be contradicted," Charlotte said firmly.

"Why should it?" Paddy asked, surprised.

Hendy left the room quietly. Charlotte held her mother's eyes as she stated quietly:

"*You* put that in the paper, Paddy."

Paddy's indignation was a dramatic one.

"I?" She cried in a shrill tone. "I?"

Then her wide incredulous eyes narrowed to two glinting slits and she nodded her head.

"You're smarter than I thought, Charley!" she said with a new warmth of approval in her voice. "Well, what if I did?"

Charlotte kept her temper well in hand as she asked, "*Why* did you do it?"

Paddy had recourse to the truth now, which she told glibly and with an obvious relish for the trickery exposed. She had borrowed large sums of money that summer on the security of Charlotte's engagement. Indeed, it was on what was left of that money that they were living at present. Only in fostering the idea of a reconciliation could they possibly hope to keep off their creditors.

Charlotte stared at her mother, dismayed and disgusted at this new vista of sordid barter, of mean manœuver, opened up so casually. A sickening sense of helplessness swept her. What possible chance of firm foothold in this quicksand of shifting

intrigue? She closed her eyes one despairing second.

"I presume Buchanan Laurence settled with the comtesse for your Paris debts," Paddy went on to explain lucidly.

"Ah, no!" This brought Charlotte to her feet with a sharp protest.

"A beautiful guaranty!" Those words came back to her now with a terrible significance. The comtesse, too, had been making a gamble of her prospects. She saw it all now quite clearly. And Buchanan had settled for her debts!

"I will pay him back! I will pay him back!" was all she could find to say.

"How?" Paddy pressed grimly for particulars. Then Paddy's anger flared.

"What a fool you are! A fool!" she cried. "If you don't look out we'll all land in the gutter!" Her violence, however, was capable of sustaining itself only briefly. In the droll picture she now proceeded to paint of their all disporting themselves in the gutter, amusement easily displaced her wrath.

"As for me," she wound up, "I think I'd rather fancy gutter etiquette, but as for you and Hendy—" She put back her head and laughed gaily. "No, you two were never cut out for gutter purposes!"

Charlotte gathered up the newspapers, strewn carelessly over the floor, and placed them in neat

piles on the center-table. It was as if she were trying to get a little order out of the chaos of her own mind. When she had finished she turned, with recovered composure, to Paddy.

"Will you contradict it or shall I?" she asked quietly.

"It? What?" Paddy was struggling with the flicker of a match that refused to impart its light to her cigarette. The process was a delicate one.

Charlotte waited a minute, then repeated her question, without further elucidation, however.

"Will you contradict it or shall I?"

Paddy took it direct now.

"Of course you know *I'm* not to be trusted," she reminded Charlotte maliciously.

"I didn't know until just now," Charlotte answered. Then, "Very well, *I'll* do the contradicting."

"You're determined?" queried Paddy, sharply.

"Absolutely," answered Charlotte.

"You know what it means?"

"I think so; we've had creditors to deal with before."

Paddy sighed deeply, shrugged, settled herself in her lounging-chair, and closed her eyes.

"*Que le bon Dieu dispose!*" she said with gay insouciance, then added as an afterthought, "But *what* can you expect of a good woman!"

CHAPTER XII

CHARLOTTE made a direct statement to the newspapers the next day, contradicting the report of her reconciliation with Mr. Dunscomb. Paddy corroborated effusively everything her daughter had to say, with a fine indignation that such erroneous rumors should be put in circulation.

"It's simply preposterous," she told a local reporter. "I, for one, should *never* consider a readjustment!" Then she lowered her voice confidentially. "I'm not prepared as yet to say there is some one else, but—" Charlotte's presence unfortunately prohibited the following out of this new inspiration, and the reporter was too stupid to take a hint. So the matter perforce ended there.

Then the creditors closed. Charlotte had thought she knew what to expect, but this particular onslaught, destined to be the climacteric one, was to prove an ordeal of unexpected crises and irking particulars. Charlotte found herself subjected at every turn to the most incredible insolence. There was a general attachment. The servants left in a body. Confusion reigned. Dull, stupid-eyed men went

about with stolid satisfaction, feeling of the heavy draperies, sounding the cutglass; others with their hats on argued volubly in the halls and stared awkwardly as Charlotte passed by. It was hideous; it was intolerable; and through all the din Paddy's voice rose shrilly to mock her chagrin.

Mr. Robinson had hastened to the scene. No possible help could be looked for from the Warrens and the Bairs. To declare bankruptcy, *that* was the only solution.

"Blessed idea!" cried Paddy.

Bankruptcy meant to Paddy rather a sell on her creditors. A sop of two or three cents on the dollar, and then a fresh start with full credit and unblemished reputation! Blessed idea, indeed!

So bankruptcy it was, executed in the best traditions of fashionable lore.

"Do we send out cards?" Paddy had wanted to know. "And is n't there some etiquette as to the proper length of retirement afterward?"

The affair got more than its share of newspaper notoriety. Society gave a confirmatory nod; the end had been in view for some time. But what under the heavens would the Bairs do next? Charlotte's mix-up had been rather an ugly one. Buchanan Laurence, himself, admitted that he had settled her Paris bills. Of course, Charlotte was Dolly's best friend, but, even so, it had to be admitted there *was*

something to be said for young Billy Dunscomb. Evidently Paddy's daughter was as unscrupulous as Paddy herself, and might be expected to live up to as spectacular a standard. However—this sententiously—time would tell.

Meanwhile, the events, subsequent to the Bairds' declaration of insolvency, were anything but spectacular. Inventories and price-lists, hundreds of them—that was what it came down to. Hendy and Charlotte toiled unceasingly. So did Paddy, though she managed to extract a pleasurable titillation from the performance that the others quite failed of. Equipped with odd scraps of paper and a stubby pencil, Paddy went through the storehouse of her treasures. The list achieved, evidence of her faithful toil, always got itself lost; the pencil refused to write, but Paddy went glibly on.

She attacked Charlotte and Hendy one day as they were listing the pictures. She had discovered in her possession bread-and-butter spreaders to the number of two hundred and eighty-eight, which number, granted even their sole diet in the future was to consist of bread and butter, Paddy considered a bit excessive. Now, what did Charlotte and Hendy think? Paddy's idea was to dispense with all save a necessary few—say ninety-nine for instance. That would be thirty-three apiece.

"What do you say, 'darling child?'" she wound up

with a nod and a grimace in Charlotte's direction.

Paddy took her greatest delight in wanton exaggeration.

Yes, there was no question about it, Paddy was having a beautiful time. She attached unto herself an old colored man, destined originally to do the heavy work. But old Joe's heavy work resolved itself very soon into trailing around after the incorrigible Paddy and laughing at all her jokes. There was something undeniably cheerful about this genial uproar; it would have been far better for Charlotte and Hendy had they attacked their work with less grimness.

Buchanan Laurence, on a week-end visit at one of the farms, had come to see them. He was genuinely dismayed at the turn things had taken and wanted to help. Charlotte was firm in her refusal. Still, for all that, she displayed a new self-consciousness in his presence. She was unable to lose the intolerable sense of her obligation to him, so she avoided his eyes. Buchanan liked her in this phase.

"You must go to Palm Beach with us in January," he said. "Dolly and I—"

Ah, Dolly! Charlotte brightened. Her recollection of Dolly was the one thing untarnished in the whole of her Parisian experience. But even as

Paddy rushed in with a voluble acceptance of the invitation, Charlotte shook her head.

"I intend to work now," she said; "paint for a living—"

"Paint Dolly," suggested Buchanan, promptly.

Charlotte weighed this as Paddy said something appropriate and sentimental about first friends and first commissions.

Charlotte committed herself in no way, however. Paddy took Buchanan to the door. Charlotte rose quickly and followed with a furtive sense of guilt. She did *not* trust Paddy. Paddy turned and bestowed on her a matchless little wink that had in it no resentment whatever of her 'dear 'daughter's distrust, only a bright desire to impart to that dear daughter the fact that she was indisputably "on."

The day came, after weeks of disorganized activities, when Paddy and Hendy and Charlotte were left alone. The house was for sale; flagrant notices of that fact hit the eye at every turn. But, even so, the temporary haven of a home is something! The last express wagon, loaded to capacity, had rattled down the driveway; the auctioneer and collector had struck their final bargain. Paddy had cut short Mr. Robinson's farewell bit of querulous advice by hustling him off to his train a good half-hour too soon. The front door banged, and they

were alone, the three of them, confronted by a long stretch of uninterrupted intimacy with its dull problem of relation.

They had gone to the living-room and sat down wearily. Even Paddy admitted to fatigue. The room was a cheerless one. Hendy had managed to save a few fine rugs and tapestries, but these had found their way to Charlotte's studio. A divan, some chairs, several tables, all rescued from the servants' hall, made for the present comfort of the room in which they found themselves. Paddy's eyes wandered about curiously.

"So *this* is respectability!" she brought out at last. "Mission furniture and domestic rugs—the apotheosis of middle-class morality!"

However, even an atmosphere of middle-class morality could not depress Paddy's spirits for more than a fleeting second. If bankruptcy had proved less rosy of reality than of vision, it mattered very little in the long run. Paddy reacted with ebullience. Besides, in the new order of things, there was Mary. Never in Paddy's whole career had she found any one as absorbing as Mary. Mary was the general servant, an Irishwoman of brawn and brogue. Mary had never seen any one like Paddy before and treated her like a pet monkey. This suited Paddy to a nicety. She chattered, she grimaced, she played tricks; she showed off shame-

lessly. She was, as it were, put on her mettle to do justice to the traditions of her tribe, and concocted a hundred absurdities daily. But—and herein lay a fine point—not once was Mary allowed to overstep the bounds of a servile deference. If Paddy chose to be the monkey, it was the monkey who boasted in her veins the blood of simian dynasties. As to Mary's own lineage, there were no illusions on either side to be sustained as to that.

“La Rochefoucauld! You’ve never heard of La Rochefoucauld, Mary?” So it drifted to Charlotte one day through the kitchen windows. “But that’s just what I might have expected from a low-down, illiterate Irishwoman!” Yes, Paddy had defined things quite clearly from the beginning.

Yet again: “Caste! Yes, it’s caste, you poor dear ignorant thing, that makes the world go round!” And Mary accepted it with simple, delighted faith.

Paddy ended by spending most of her time in the kitchen. She developed an inordinate curiosity in regard to batters and crusts. She adored mixtures, concocting a few feverish ones herself. She broke dishes and burnt herself and dropped bits of butter on the floor. However, she was genuinely impressed with herself in her new domestic rôle and began to dress to suit the part, imitating all unconsciously the low-down Irishwoman. She began to twist her hair, as Mary did, into a tight knot

that sat at a most abandoned angle on the top of her head. She gave up rouge and powder and wore a black shawl about her shoulders. She declared finally that she intended to go in exclusively for those fascinating mother-hubbards that made Mary look so chic. But Charlotte intervened at this point, sternly prohibitive.

Then Paddy had a higher vision of a more general efficiency. House-cleaning! *There* lay an opportunity, indeed, in the particular realization of which the making of sauces lost something of its original savor. Paddy donned a new, atrocious kind of cap and apron and the game was on. She could be seen at any hour pursuing a dust-pan as it rattled down the steps, or brandishing a duster with fine disregard of her own frenzied sneezes. To see Charlotte and Hendy settle quietly to their books for an evening's reading was the unmistakable signal for Paddy to feel the stir of her new passion. She would look up and down the long room, shake her head in disapproval, and mutter ominously. Then one nervous spring, and the evening's quiet was at an end. Piles of newspapers, magazines, books, ash-trays were tumbled from one table to another. Desk drawers were pulled out with a tussle of resistance and a recoil like the kick of a gun. Their contents were emptied over everything, "to be sorted out later." Charlotte and Hendy would say nothing

until their own chairs were demanded for some reason or other, or until Paddy had to be rescued from some new height she had essayed in the pursuit of a fleck of dust. Eventually they were driven to their own rooms. But Paddy, driven on by her demon, would work and chuckle and upset until far into the night. It would fall upon the faithful Mary in the morning to work a little order out of the nocturnal chaos.

Charlotte saw Paddy's pranks as deliberately planned with the purpose of tormenting her, so disregarded them completely for the most part. It annoyed her extremely that Hendy was not able to assume a like indifference. His obvious unhappiness at each turn of Paddy's perversity seemed to Charlotte but another indication of his fundamental weakness of character. She was coldly impatient, in an arrogant way, of his lack of self-control, his inability to exercise the power of will in keeping up appearances. So, too, she was intolerant of his failures when he ventured into the field of the practical.

The doughty Mary had found the care of the furnace too taxing for her strength, so Hendy had taken over the responsibility. But drafts and dampers proved of an intricacy that Hendy, untutored even in the rudiments of heating lore, was utterly unable to grasp. He was always in a feverish state of discovering that the fire was either

completely out or else so far gone there was n't a chance of resuscitation.

Flagrant incompetence!—so Charlotte set it down. She met Hendy's murmured excuses with sharpness. Eventually, with a fine disregard of his protests, she decided to look out for the furnace herself. The result was everything that could be asked of neat regulation. Hendy withdrew more and more into himself after that.

It was a long, bitter winter that stretched an intolerable length. Snow weighed down the trees and blocked the roads, its softness and beauty in the relentless grip of the cold disfigured into a harsh and jagged thing of ice. Charlotte walked miles, despite the severity of the weather, or else shoveled paths to show Hendy it could be done without too much fatigue. It was bleak enough outside, Heaven knows, but it was preferable to the cheerlessness within. For there was something about the old house with its leaking roof, its loose shutters that banged with dismal regularity, its vistas of chill empty rooms, once so cozy and charming and gay, that depressed Charlotte to the point of miserable despair. Even the solace of her studio was denied her, as the wind blowing through the big north skylight was impossible to combat. She had brought her easel down to the living-room, but it had proved to have one too many legs for Paddy successfully to avoid.

So she had taken it back upstairs and given up her painting.

At intervals Paddy, noting possibly the low ebb of spirits in those about her, would announce mischievously that she had had a "tip from the Almighty" and knew something nice was going to happen. Charlotte came to realize eventually these tips were synchronous with the writing of certain letters which Paddy concocted with much labored secrecy. Pathetic appeals to remote Warrens and Bairds! It did n't require much penetration on Charlotte's part to guess that. She attacked Paddy bitterly, made her case on the grounds of pride. Paddy was duly contrite, had n't thought of it in that light at all, and agreed with the proper solemnity to do nothing, nothing whatever in future without consulting Charlotte. A week or so later, with apparently no sense of the incongruous, Paddy would read out a letter from an irate great-uncle or a sententious greater-aunt in answer to some new importunity for money. A letter came from Philip from Yokohama. He was on his way around the world with Cassimer and some other friends. He refused point-blank to hurt his own interests by borrowing for Paddy. Strange to say, this wrung from Paddy the most intense admiration.

"He'll never let sentiment interfere with *his* interests," quoth she, and turned her back on Char-

lotte's bitter protest against the whole miserable business.

Repeated invitations came from Dolly to join them in Palm Beach, in Havana, in the Indies, but Charlotte would not hear of leaving Newport. Paddy's discomfiture at each abrupt refusal showed that in some way she had planned to make capital of Dolly's friendship, too. Poor Charlotte!

Occasionally, despite the cold, Charlotte would climb to her studio of an afternoon and try to think. But the place had taken on an unfamiliar look in its disuse. There was dust, dust everywhere, on the books, the table, the chairs, her easel. The unfinished canvases in the fading light appeared the strange creations of another's hand. Weird and gruesome they seemed. As her wondering eyes rested upon them, she had the startled illusion of so many personalities struggling tragically for the expression of themselves out of an inexorable blackness. This illusion haunted her perpetually, the reproach in those half-formed faces, upturned to her in wistful appeal. But she was powerless to help them, as she was powerless to help herself. She, too, was caught in a blackness from which there seemed no escape, the blackness of a hardly tempered unforgiveness.

So the dull round of the lagging weeks that made up that harsh and unlovely winter passed and spring came. Hendy talked of his crocus bulbs. Paddy

sat on the terrace in a shawl and jaunty yachting-cap and gossiped about Mother Nature while Hendy did the digging. Charlotte sat on the veranda outside her own room and tried to read. But her eyes were drawn continually to those two down there in the garden and there was a dull wonder in her heart.

Then one day Hendy failed to come down to lunch. He had over-tired himself digging.

"He'll be all right to-morrow," Paddy predicted brightly.

"A bad cold!" was the report next day. Charlotte thought nothing of it. She took her easel to the cliffs the following morning and painted till late afternoon. The ocean rested, strangely quiet and peaceful, under the soft purple haze that hovered above it. The air was warm, inviting gentle relaxation. A few gulls circled quietly in the heavens; others floated on the water like scattered magnolia blossoms. Charlotte lingered, to court a little the spell of the season's content. Then at dusk she started home.

Paddy met her at the door, confused, excited, incoherent. Hendy was ill, very ill. And there was the doctor, explaining something to somebody; and at a distance, ghostly, unsubstantial, hovered a white-clad figure that kept nodding and beckoning.

"Pneumonia!"

The word cut into Charlotte's consciousness like

a knife. She put her hand on her heart and stared at the doctor with wide, terrified eyes.

"Pneumonia!" He said it again gently, as she did not seem to understand. He put out his hand to her as she tottered, but she caught herself up and covered her face with her trembling hands. A long-drawn sob shivered up from the depths of her being. Then she turned and, clinging to the balustrade, made her way, weeping and stumbling, up the stairs. Hendy! Hendy was ill! A terrible remorse, a more terrible fear, and the overwhelming tenderness of a great yearning! Hendy! All the discords and defiances that had blurred the brightness of their love fell away; he was there for her now as he always had been, the same dear Hendy who had guided her through the years in the unselfishness of a great love, in the understanding of a perfect sympathy. Hendy! Hendy! She cried it out in the surge of her emotions as she staggered to his door. Another white-clad figure confronted her. She tried to check her sobs, but they burst out in spite of her. Then the faint sound of her name came from within the room and she had broken by the white sentinel and was on her knees at the bedside.

"Hendy, Hendy darling!" was all she could cry. Her voice choked. She seized his hand in both of hers and fondled it. "Hendy, Hendy dear," she sobbed, and bent her wet face to his. She could see

him now through her tears, the light of joy in his eyes that were yet heavy with a bewildered pain.

“Mignon!” he murmured. “Mignon!”

Charlotte’s tears continued to fall, but in the pressure of his dear hand that established once more the old current of their sympathy she found a little relief from the bitterness of her self-reproach.

CHAPTER XIII

THEY let her stay with him until the end, which came three days later, in the early evening. Hendy did not want to die and for the first time in his life showed the capability of powerful resistance. He fought and Charlotte fought with him. At times she would soothe his suffering, quietly, gently, murmuring tender endearments, stroking the hand that was forever groping for hers. And again when, worn out with pain, he seemed to be sinking, it was the passion of her grief that penetrated the gathering twilight of his fading consciousness and roused him to fresh struggle.

At times Paddy was there by the bedside, staring wild-eyed, but she seemed no more real to Charlotte than the other phantoms of that sick-room.

There came a time when the doctor pronounced it a matter of hours. Charlotte threw herself on her knees beside the bed and buried her face in her hands to choke back the shivering sobs. There was, perhaps, a new quality of despair in her weeping, for Hendy seemed suddenly to understand. He reached for her hand once more; a few tears forced themselves from under his closed lids and trickled down

his cheeks. A few minutes later a calm came over him. He opened his eyes and there was a sudden brightness in them. His lips moved. Charlotte was bending over him.

"What is it, dearest?" she murmured.

A smile of sweetness lighted up his face.

"Paddy!" he said faintly.

"Paddy!" Charlotte's own eyes brightened as she understood. He was entrusting Paddy to her—poor, perverse, erring Paddy—and everything fine and generous within her responded to the sacredness of that trust.

"Yes," she answered. "Yes"; then added in a low voice, "always."

He smiled at her again, a luminous smile of tenderness and gratitude. Then his eyes closed.

A little later, with the relaxation of his hand, Charlotte knew the end had come. She rose, trembling, seeking a quiet resignation in the contemplation of Hendy's peace. But there came to her, as she gazed intently at the dear features so strangely still, only the terrible, tragic sense of her loss. She turned and, bursting into harsh, uncontrollable cries, she rushed from the room.

Charlotte awakened that night to the patter of the rain on the big elm outside her window. One of the nurses had undressed her and put her to bed,

administering a sleeping potion of immediate effect, but Charlotte remembered nothing of this. There was no bewilderment, however, in her awakening, no rush of tragic recollection. She awoke simply and quietly to the fact that Hendy was dead. A few tears welled to her eyes; that was all. She had no sense of anything that had happened from the time Hendy's hand had loosened its clasp of hers until now, this moment of deep quiet, this moment of resignation. In reality, Charlotte's calm had its root in utter physical fatigue and emotional exhaustion. She would feel again and often the sweep of passionate revolt, the terrible grief of her loss, but she did not know that now. She read in the 'deep stillness of the night—a stillness that seemed the more intense for that gentle patter of the rain in the trees—the boon of a strange resignation. It was somehow as Hendy would have wanted it to be. Hendy was dead. Hendy! She whispered the name softly to herself. Then with a sudden yearning to see him again she rose, and, throwing a robe about her shoulders, she went to his room. A sob rose in her throat as she opened the door. The room was lighted dimly. He was lying on the bed, his thin long body attenuated by the folds of the sheet, his fine drawn face of plastic beauty. A few of his own early daffodils were on the table by his side. Charlotte's rising emotion was quelled. She knelt

down by the bed and closed her eyes. She was in the presence of Death, that incalculable, baffling factor of life, and she was singularly unafraid. As she knelt there, it seemed as if she were back in old Trinity again, in the mellow light of the fading day. She could see the face of the Christ in the window, strangely real, strangely tender.

“I am the resurrection and the life.”

Before that poignant message of forgiveness she saw the arrogance of her own attitude of hard relentlessness. She had set herself up as a tribunal of righteousness and she had condemned insolently. Poor Hendy! Sin and weakness were forgotten in the silent hush of this room of death; only love, the love of understanding, remained.

Charlotte knelt there a long, long time. Then she rose and once more let her eyes rest lovingly on Hendy's face. And it seemed to her as she stood there as if the whole scroll of Hendy's life were slowly unrolled, before her eyes. She saw him eager, vivid, in the supreme confidence of youth; she saw him, weak and broken, surrendered to a passion that was all a great love and a terrible doubt. Did Paddy care? And he had sought refuge from that doubt in his 'devotion to her, to Charlotte, his child. Yes, she was Hendy's child. She knew that now, and her thoughts were strangely of Florence and the cypress-trees.

"I lived here two years before you were born." Paddy's words, fraught with a deep significance, came back across the echoing years.

Then there came to Charlotte a sharp pang. Paddy! She seemed to see the word hovering on Hendy's still lips. Paddy! She had not seen Paddy. Absorbed in her own sorrow, she had forgotten Paddy. It seemed the wilful betrayal of a sacred trust. A sudden accession of tenderness came to her. Poor Paddy! she must go to her in her grief.

She took one jonquil from the vase and laid it on Hendy's breast. Then she bent down and kissed his forehead. The shiver of the cold contact started her tears afresh. She sobbed softly for a minute; then, with a forced calm, she started for Paddy's room. The light under the door revealed that Paddy, too, had been keeping the night's vigil. Again that quick accession of a protective tenderness! Charlotte knocked softly. There was no answer, but, as the door was ajar, she pushed it open. She was conscious, first of all, of a bright glare that dazzled her. Every light in the place was lighted. She shaded her eyes with her hand and came into the room, which struck her at once as close and intolerably hot. Paddy was lying, fully dressed, on a divan directly under the central glare of lights. A sheet of newspaper was thrown over her head.

She was evidently asleep. Charlotte went over to her softly. Paddy stirred, and the newspaper rustled to the floor. A queer contorted smile twisted Paddy's lips; then she slowly opened her eyes to Charlotte's. There was in their wide dilation an expression that was essentially malignant, subtle, evil, low—an expression that blurred gradually to a wicked delight as she read in Charlotte's eyes the slow birth of a tragic comprehension. Paddy roused herself and with a vague heavy gesture pointed to a small table close by. In the confusion of litter upon it, Charlotte's horrified gaze made out only the pointed glitter of a hypodermic needle. White, gasping, terrified, she turned, and, to the shrill rise of Paddy's mocking laugh, she fled out of the room.

PART IV

CHAPTER XIV

IT was the day before Christmas. Charlotte had put the last festive touch to the little studio and then sat down to contemplate her work. The place *was* rather jolly, with its green wreaths in the windows and bright splashes of holly here and there. Charlotte looked at the clock; it was just three. Paddy's train was due at four. She went into the diminutive kitchenette; yes, the chicken was still there, and the celery, and cranberry jelly.

It was surprising, really, how happy she felt, happy in a subdued, sad sort of way of course, but still happy. This place, although she had been in it only a week, had already the comfortable quality of home, *her* home; for it was her money that was paying for it. She took a piece of paper and pencil and began to figure. Fifty a month for rent; three hundred and fifty she had paid outright to the former tenant for the furniture; that left—Charlotte had gone through this calculation twenty times before, but she brought to it each time the same bright

energy. It gave her more completely than anything else the sense of herself in her new rôle. Divide that by three and there you are! Charlotte was beginning to add and subtract quite nonchalantly now. Arithmetic had never been her strong point, for Paddy had considered training along those lines unnecessary and absurd.

"You'll always be able to *pay* some one to do it for you," she had reasoned.

Charlotte smiled at this recollection. And here she was in entire charge of the family finance! Her thoughts reverted with tenderness to Hendy. He had left all his money, to the amount of fifty thousand dollars, to her in trust. Paddy had resented hotly that trust clause, but Charlotte was very, very thankful for it. Whatever happened, that money was there, safely and securely there, in investments of so conservative a nature that they were good for all time. Two thousand a year! It was as if Hendy had hung a protecting veil between her and the harsh world of necessity. Poor dear Hendy! Charlotte wondered as she looked about the studio whether Hendy could have adjusted himself to the conditions under which they were now forced to live. Hendy had not been meant for vulgar contacts. As to Paddy, she could already hear *her* voluble enthusiasms directed indiscriminately at skylight, alcove bedroom, tumble-down furniture,

and all. Even the district—Macdougall Street below the Square—Paddy was sure to pronounce as “fascinating.” And she, Charlotte, would find her happiness in Paddy’s.

Charlotte looked at the clock again and began to worry as to whether or not she should have allowed Paddy to come from Newport alone. Paddy was still not strong. But it had seemed the wisest course to leave her in Newport with the faithful Mary until Charlotte had secured the haven of a new home in New York. The house in Newport had been sold in August, but the people who had bought it had kindly suffered them to remain till the New Year. In August Paddy was still too ill to be moved.

As Charlotte looked back at the tragedy of that illness, the details of it seemed utterly incredible. It was as a fearful nightmare and she, herself, was the grimmest specter. Again she had set herself up as a tribunal of justice. But this time her arrogance, full-blown, had not been content with the simple act of condemnation; it had gone on to the rash control of another’s will, another’s destiny. Yes, it all seemed incredible now, as she sat there waiting for Paddy in the little holly-decorated studio that was to be their home. Yet, only a few months ago it had happened, really!

Charlotte had been the only one to follow Hendy to his grave, as Paddy was still in a state of coma

the day of the funeral. The tenderness and peace that should have been Charlotte's on that bright spring morning as she stood by Hendy's grave were lost utterly in the sense of her new horror, that was taking on gradually the grimness of a great resolve.

That afternoon Charlotte had given Mary a two-weeks' vacation. Then she had gone to Paddy's room. She did not look at Paddy, although she was sharply conscious of her in her sluggish torpor. She systematically went about what she had to do. She swept off the litter of bottles from the table, the glittering hypodermic needle. She searched every drawer in the place, the closet, the bath-room, removing every bottle that she found. Then she went out and locked the door.

The details of that week of conflict were grim and ghastly. Charlotte had no idea of the thing she was doing. Drugs to her meant indulgence, and indulgence should be curbed. So—bitter, cruel, determined—she persisted. Three times a day she took a tray of food to Paddy's room and returned an hour later to take it away. That was all.

Poor Paddy! At first she had been only incredulous, thinking the matter a joke. Then reading the truth in Charlotte's unflinching gaze, she had assumed a gay bravado, a flippant defiance, which broke in a few hours, under the importunities of her craving, to a whimper of pleading. She had paced

the floor the whole of that first night, crying out, arguing, begging. Charlotte was in the next room, close-lipped, sleepless. In the morning when she went to Paddy with her breakfast-tray she read the suffering in the glinting, mocking eyes as only a part of Paddy's wily trickery. Paddy refused to eat; that, too, was a part of her game. The terrible nausea, the dizziness, the sinking weakness—what else could she expect in her obstinate refusal of food? So Charlotte remained obdurate, hardly determined through a succession of days and nights when Paddy's screams rose to a greater and greater frenzy of tortured agony. Then she found her one day in a convulsive fit on the floor, beating her head against the wall. Her face was cut. Yet, as Charlotte bent over her and, sobbing, cried out her terror, there was in Paddy's eyes a certain wicked gleam of triumph. A second later, in a last spasm of excruciating pain, Paddy lost consciousness.

Yes, it was utterly incredible now. She had nearly killed Paddy. The doctor had been kind, but he did not mince matters. A month later, when the actual danger for Paddy was over, and Charlotte was able to recover a little her hold on herself, the doctor made a point of telling her much in regard to the nature of her mother's disease. The absolute blunting of the moral sense, utter disregard of time and circumstance, plausibility, disorderliness—she

saw it all quite clearly now, and was glad that she did, for she wanted understanding. Paddy's perversities, that she had hitherto attributed to wilfulness, she saw now were the inevitable symptoms of her disorder. She realized with sadness the intensity of Hendy's sufferings as he had watched the growth of that disorder with the years.

Charlotte had asked the doctor in regard to a cure in a sanatorium, but he had shaken his head.

"A matter of several years in this case," he pronounced, "with a probable relapse afterwards! No, I'd let her go. Make her happy; that's all you can do," he added kindly.

He read the fearful questioning in her eyes and took her hand.

"You will have years and years together," he assured her. "It is surprising how they do endure. She is *broken*, that is all."

Poor Paddy! Yes, she *was* broken, but the baleful struggle of that week was, strangely enough, not wholly unavailing. Charlotte came to realize that summer an indefinable change in Paddy's attitude toward her. In the terrible conflict of their wills, Charlotte had for the first time compelled Paddy's respect. Henceforth, she was to exist for Paddy as a personality to be reckoned with. Paddy could tease, trick, torment, but back of it all was the recognition of Charlotte as a power. Perhaps, of

her agony there had been born in Paddy's breast a little of affection, too. Charlotte often wondered vaguely as to that, but did not know.

Then, too, Paddy's illness was to work out to an illumination of other things that had troubled Charlotte sorely since Hendy's death. Paddy had been fitfully delirious for weeks, and in her delirium betrayed herself. It was of Hendy she talked, always Hendy, and their love. She called for him; then, with a glimmer of realization, she would begin to sob and cry piteously. She moaned in her sleep and whimpered softly when she awoke, and always she talked of Florence and the cypress-trees. But the memories of her early days blurred strangely with later memories,—unhappy, confused memories. Charlotte heard her own name again and again. Then she began to understand. Paddy had been jealous of her, jealous of Hendy's devotion. Stupefied, she listened. Yes, she could see many things with startling clearness now. That dogged persistent antagonism she had sensed, even as a child, behind the veil of Paddy's flippancy had had its root in the jealousy of a great love. The years that had been so beautiful to Charlotte, when she and Hendy had wandered in tender intimacy through the streets of Florence, had been years of poignant tragedy to poor Paddy.

The immediate resumption of Paddy's old gaiety

upon emerging from her fever made Charlotte the more tender of the secrets disclosed, the more tender of Paddy herself. But Paddy must never know her delirium had betrayed her.

As Paddy was sitting up in bed one day, a jaunty bandage on her head and a cigarette in her mouth, she had showed herself curious, perhaps even a little uneasy, as to the nature of her ravings. It was for Charlotte in all charity to put her at her ease.

"Did I," she queried, narrowing her eyes and nodding her head, "get sentimental? People do, you know."

Charlotte smiled. "Sentimental is hardly the word," she answered. "Ribald is better, I should say."

This delighted Paddy inordinately. She had been running true to form even in the valley of the shadow. She chuckled to herself.

Then, "How did old prosy take it?" she asked, indicating the nurse in the next room.

"Oh, I sent her out before it got too bad," laughed Charlotte.

"A sound of ribaldry by night," said Paddy. Poor perverse, tragic Paddy!

So Charlotte reviewed in her mind the scenes of that summer, as she sat and waited for Paddy. She arose at last with a sigh and looked about. Yes,

everything was ready. Some good cigarettes for Paddy! Paddy had sunk to Sweet Caporals during her convalescence. Charlotte straightened a piece of holly over the mantel and then went to take another look at the chicken. She hadn't the remotest idea how to cook a chicken herself. But, of course, Paddy—Paddy was of a temerity that would have attempted with the blithest confidence the broiling of a live ostrich.

The bell rang. Charlotte slammed the ice-chest door, touched the bell-click, put a match to the carefully laid fire, and in a high state of excitement rushed out into the hall. Just in time to catch the boxes and bundles hurtled at her, as Paddy stubbed her toe on the top step! Panting, chattering, gasping, Paddy had related a dozen indiscriminate anecdotes before Charlotte got her into the room. Somebody was a "regular oaf" and somebody else a "gentleman of the old school." And she didn't have any change and had to give the taxi-man a dollar tip and—

Once on the threshold of her new demesne, however, everything broke to an ecstasy of extravagant praise.

A grotesque, pathetic, yet amusing little figure Paddy was as she stood there with the fire-light playing over her. She had on a new coat, a big

cumbersome thing like a man's overcoat, which made her look the more shrunken and diminutive. Her face was sallow, the big scar on her temple and cheek a livid contrast. Her lower lip trembled; her hands were unsteady; but one lost all sense of her weakness in the bright darting energy of her eyes, in the shrill lilt of her voice. She had taken off her hat and kicked it into a corner as she ran her fingers through her wispy hair. Then, almost sacramentally, she proceeded to doff the coat. This coat was Paddy's first economy, eleven dollars she had paid for it; Charlotte forced herself to a faint approval, which was lost in Paddy's own babbling delight of possession.

Then Paddy's keen eyes discerned an artificial poinsettia on the mantel, a flamboyant velvet thing. "A mongrel touch!" she cried and, seizing it, threw it into the fire.

Speaking of mongrels—ah, Mary! Paddy was off with a chuckle. Mary had been a patroness at an "ash-man's ball." Details were in order. What Paddy failed to impart, however, was that, really impressed by Mary in this new light of the social dilettante, she had passed over to her much of her own finery from the Rue de la Paix. She had to admit to a few little trifles she had given her "to drape her dear old fat self in," but that was all; the extent of her generosity Charlotte was to discover only with time.

Mary had sent many tender messages to Charlotte. Oh, and a cake, a noble cake! The wicker suit-case, Paddy's second economy, now claimed the spot-light. Paddy had packed the cake right on the top, but, by a most extraordinary reversal, it was discovered on the bottom, its noble proportions very much out of line. And, oh dear, oh dear! The frosting had all come off on the paper! And now what is this big bulky bundle that was on top of it? Ah, of course! Paddy unwrapped with a flourish a bottle, Pomerey Sec. "The last of a royal line!" she cried. "We'll have it for Christmas dinner to-morrow," said Charlotte, rescuing it. Paddy had had it by the neck and was handling it like an Indian club. Then Paddy had to be shown the chicken, which she felt all over with the air of a chef premier and pronounced "of an ineffability."

So they talked on and on, ranging easily from legal adjustments to giblet gravy. Neither was hungry, so they contented themselves with tea and Mary's cake for supper. At nine o'clock Paddy drooped and confessed fatigue. The conductor had insisted on gossiping to her during the whole train trip. Disconcerting and tedious. So she went in to her little alcove bedroom and with a cheerful "*Buono notte*," she shut the door.

Charlotte undressed slowly. The metamorphosis from divan to bed was effected, and she settled her-

self for the night. She was tired, but she could not sleep. She was happy; yes, she was happy, but that dull ache in her heart was still there. The rays of the winter's moon shone faintly through the skylight, illuminating the clumsy little room with a pale, strange glow. One ray, the brightest, rested on the holly over the mantel.

The tears welled to Charlotte's eyes and she buried her face in the pillow. A year ago she had passed over without comment the decorations Hendy had labored to achieve for their Christmas cheer. But, as she lay there sobbing, the warm vision of him, busy with his bright wreaths and holly, blurred to that other image when, as he lay dying, he had intrusted Paddy to her care.

"Paddy!" he had murmured, and, as Charlotte lay there, the sweetness of his smile seemed to pervade her spirit with its message of gentle faith.

Paddy! Charlotte roused herself. Yes, she was going to make Paddy very happy. Paddy's happiness was to be the atonement of her wrong to Hendy. She smiled a little. The moon was very bright now; her eyes rested on the holly over the mantel with steady calm. Christmas Eve! Peace and good will to men! She sighed. Her thoughts turned to those other Christmas Eves in Florence when they had all been so happy together. And then—then,

yes, there had been Christmas Eves for Paddy and Hendy before ever she had been born. Poor Hendy! Poor Paddy!

A half-hour later she had fallen asleep.

CHAPTER XV

CHARLOTTE'S main object in settling in New York was to study art, that she might eventually by some commercial application of it increase her income. Paddy was to do the housekeeping, and so keep out of mischief. The scheme worked well. Paddy was given a certain amount of money with which to do the marketing, a process that took hours. She made fast friends of all the trades-gentlemen and never came in without a dozen most extraordinary adventures to relate with graphic animation. She soon became a prime favorite with all the urchins in the neighborhood and dispensed pennies with a princely largesse. She knew how many children the iceman had, what ladies in the district were of negligible reputation, how many dark-eyed restaurant-keepers boasted royal blood in their veins. Oh, yes, Paddy knew her district thoroughly, and by degrees Charlotte learned it, too. She would figure indefinitely to find a dollar that Paddy was begging for young Giuseppe Salvati, who wanted to go to the circus; or she would do without pastries for lunch that the fifty cents might

buy for some nice old lady—"a good old soul but weak," as Paddy reported it—a drink of real whisky. Paddy's charities were as bizarre as they were extensive.

In regard to her household duties Paddy made good, in that she lifted the practical to the higher level of the imaginative. She decried the rut; housekeeping, according to her, should be made to partake of the nature of a beautiful adventure. Paddy had brilliant, exhilarating ideas; there was no question about it. Each day abounded in elaborate surprises, some of which could be eaten, others of which ended ignominiously in the refuse-can. However, no remembrance of past failures could ever dampen Paddy's ardor for experiments, the richer and more complex the better. But there was rather a jolly gamble about it, so Charlotte let her go, with only an occasional insistence on a potato or plain boiled rice. Paddy talked unceasingly as she worked, made of the little kitchenette "a salon, so to speak"; she smoked, too. A cigarette, however, once put down was forgotten, and perforce burnt out, unobserved, its little life, and whatever else happened to be in its immediate proximity as well. Holes appeared—it was really most astounding—in the rug, in the upholstered chairs, even in the curtains. The kitchenette shelves were as strange cabalistic signs wrought in

burnt wood. Charlotte tried to be firm and extracted a dozen promises daily. Of no avail, however!

"You know, the most extraordinary thing—" Paddy would greet Charlotte hardly in the door. "The waste-basket—dear me, yes! Most spectacular blaze! Spontaneous combustion, without a doubt!"

"But what did you do?" cried Charlotte, alarmed.

"Played Nero and watched it burn," retorted Paddy, chuckling, "to get fresh inspiration. Behold my new Iliad," she wound up, indicating a chocolate pudding.

Yes, indeed, keeping house was gay and jolly and dangerous under the régime of the incorrigible Paddy.

Charlotte went daily to the League. She liked the life there, the enthusiasm, the eagerness. Her own zest for painting came back and she worked with ardor. She took her fellow students, however, in a detached way. Collectively, they made for a certain vividness of background, a geniality of atmosphere. But individually, why bother?

Then one day as she sat painting, there came within her range of vision a face strangely familiar, a face that startled poignant memories. She stopped abruptly. Roger Canby! His resemblance to Hendy was the more striking now, for he seemed

older, more fine-drawn than when she had seen him on shipboard. Only a little over a year ago that was; it did n't seem possible, so much had happened to her since!

She could see Roger more clearly now and studied him reflectively. She wondered vaguely what the year had brought him. Yes, he was very like Hendy. Her eyes followed him as he rose and walked across the room. That same slenderness of structure, the fine quality of his quietness that was yet a nervous restraint, a tempering of intensity. He had gone back to his easel now. Charlotte glanced at the picture on it, then rose impulsively and went over to him. She saw that he recognized her, but they did not descend to the banalities of recollection.

She indicated his picture on the easel. "I was noticing it before class this morning," she said simply. "It is so fine, I wanted to tell you."

He smiled at her. She was conscious of shadows in his eyes, of a light but partially glimmering through.

"I like it," he said. "I am glad you do." His voice was firmer than she expected.

"You do entirely landscapes?" she asked.

"Yes," he answered. "And you do portraits."

So he had noticed her! Charlotte was pleased.

"But I never finish them," she confessed.

He laughed at that. "You are restless, then!"

Charlotte considered this; it was a new idea to her.

They touched fleetingly on color, on line. Then Charlotte went back to her own place. Yes, he was very like Hendy, but there was a difference that eluded her.

That was the beginning of a friendship that was purely and simply a relation of understanding, of sympathy. Neither made an attempt to extend it beyond the class room, as if reluctant to reduce it to the commonplace of address and telephone. They met at their work; they talked; they liked each other. And always the light in Roger's eyes was dimmed by shadow, and always Charlotte wondered. Would love wreck Roger's life as it had wrecked Hendy's? Roger believed as Hendy had once believed, as she herself had believed. She had made that out in the very beginning; Roger was an idealist. How would it end? A strange accession of tenderness would sweep her as she questioned. But as she watched him at his work her doubts became quiescent. His work was his life; in his devotion to that he might be able, perhaps, to keep the purity of his faith; in his devotion to that he might find his happiness as she was finding hers in her devotion to Paddy. She enjoyed her musings, in spite of their melodramatic tinge, at which she often

found herself smiling broadly. On the whole, Charlotte's intercourse with Roger that winter did much for her. Though her actual belief in life could never be restored, she was able to regain a certain naturalness of outlook that worked to a partial optimism. With Roger she could be herself again. The harsh aggressiveness, the flippant destructiveness that were still a part of her defensive attitude toward the outside world were discarded in his presence. If the rest of the students set her down as a cynic, a snob, perhaps even as a bully, Roger saw her as she really was, simple, straightforward, frank and tender. The friendship proved a splendid one and both Roger and Charlotte were happy in it.

Then, too, for Charlotte that winter, there was Dolly. Not that she saw much of Dolly, for she refused decisively to be included in any of Dolly's parties.

"As long as I can't live up to it, why should I go in at all?" she reasoned sagely. "That life is no longer mine."

"But you'll marry money!" Dolly had stated dispassionately.

"Of course!" corroborated Paddy, bright-eyed. Charlotte did not meet this.

However, there was a great joy in the days Dolly came to her. The apartment at first had filled Dolly

with amazement. Her wide blue eyes kept looking about for more. But once she had fully grasped its limitations, it took on the nature of something so bizarre—so ridiculous, in fact—that it won her completely and she “yearned to it,” Dolly’s own expression. She adored coming down and drinking tea out of the sadly maimed tea-cups. She would arrive in her lovely sables, sink among the dirty cushions on the divan, and sigh sadly. Dolly was beginning to see the limitations of her own sphere of life and was adopting a pretty ennui of it. “Nothing but dinners and dances and parties,” she murmured wistfully.

Dolly’s career had been a peculiar one. She had taken with a certain indifference the homage, the love-making, the extravagant fêting that were hers by right of her millions. She had been unmoved and untouched. Dolly had curiosities, not always wholesome ones; she lacked utterly, however, the energy to achieve experience. So now she began to fancy herself as bored with this life that had given her nothing, to read her temperament as an artistic one, pathetically thwarted by environment. This idea began to absorb her more and more as she gazed up at the big north skylight and sipped her lukewarm tea. She had been moved to express herself with unusual definiteness one day.

“I should like to have a studio,” she brought forth.

"Not like this, of course, but a really smart one—" There was something wistful and sweet and naïve in Dolly's tactlessness. "A smart place," she pursued, "where you could get the right people together for bohemian parties—"

"I see what you mean." Paddy took it seriously. "Have a salon."

"Yes, that's just it," Dolly put in eagerly.

Paddy nodded. "And be a Récamier!"

"Yes." Dolly's blue eyes brightened.

"You're cut out for it," said Paddy enthusiastically. "A brilliant hostess, *voilà tout!* Control conversation, turn the tide of politics, leave your imprint on art, music, and letters—"

"Yes," nodded Dolly with rapturous innocence. "That's just what I mean!"

Charlotte refused to meet Paddy's eyes. Paddy's sport of Dolly angered her beyond measure. She changed the subject abruptly.

Dolly came down to supper occasionally, bringing champagne. The parties were pleasant ones; eating on a card-table seemed to Dolly, perhaps, the first step toward the realization of her Récamier vision.

"Why don't *you* try to paint?" Paddy put it to her once.

"I'm sure I could if I tried," Dolly said. "But it is rather messy, is n't it?" she appealed to Charlotte, who, laughing, pointed at her dirty smock.

"What would you like to paint?" Paddy pressed for particulars.

"Flowers, I think," said Dolly.

Paddy nodded. "*That* would have been my line, had *I* painted!" she commented. Her eyes gleamed; Charlotte was busy now in the kitchenette.

"Speaking of flower-painting—" Paddy leaned over and put her hand confidentially on Dolly's arm. "Don't you adore Rembrandt's 'Portrait of a Daisy'? Let's see, Louvre, is n't it?" This last in a tone as of one art connoisseur to another.

Dolly in a faint voice thought it was.

But no, there was one other Paddy liked better—Velasquez's "Bunch of Buttercups"!

"Now, *there* is temperament for you!" cried Paddy, excitedly, flinging herself back in her chair. "*There is action!*"

And Dolly began to feel that at last she was making good in Paddy's eyes.

"*Fleur du mal!*" Paddy called her slyly after that. Dolly, all unsuspecting, was delighted.

Charlotte took exception to this after Dolly had left. "Dolly is good!" she declared stoutly.

"How do you know?" queried Paddy.

After all, how did she know? How did she know anything, for that matter?

Her adoration of Dolly persisted, however, in spite of Paddy's gibes. Dolly was there for

Charlotte as she had been in the old days of the Newport show, a lovely little thing to care for and protect. She reacted to Dolly at certain times of nervous irritability as one would react to the refreshing innocence of a child. Dolly's tepidity she called gentleness, Dolly's vacuity reserve. Occasionally she and Dolly took long rides out in the country in Dolly's limousine, away out where the air was pure and the snow was clean. She found it blissfully restful and attributed it all to Dolly, pretending not to hear when Paddy muttered about expensive springs and extravagant upholstery. Still, the difference of opinion in regard to Dolly was a minor consideration, after all.

It was the first of February, when they had been in New York about a month, that the first real issue arose between Charlotte and Paddy. Paddy had to all appearances accepted without question Charlotte's every edict in regard to the financial ruling of the establishment. She was given, besides her own private allowance, so much a week with which to run the house. No bills, of course; that was understood. Besides, none of the small shops where they traded would have given them credit, anyway, for they were total strangers. So when the first bill arrived, Charlotte put it down as a mistake.

"You paid for these things, Paddy; did n't you?" she asked.

"Why of course!" answered Paddy, annoyed. "How stupid! I'll go right over and talk to them!"

She took the bill and secreted it under some books. Paddy was always secreting little things here and there, as a squirrel does nuts.

In the next mail came six other bills. Paddy went to the door and under cover of much banter with the janitress deftly slipped them all in her pocket. Then she began to hum.

Charlotte was busy at her easel; she stopped short in her work and listened. There was a peculiar quality in that hum that meant something.

"What is it, Paddy?" she asked.

"'Vertisement!" answered Paddy glibly, waving a hand-bill that had been about the place for a week. "Listen to this, my child. Stupendous bargains! Gingham, prints—"

Charlotte watched her shrewdly.

"What's that in your pocket?" she asked.

"Pocket!" exclaimed Paddy. "Pocket!" and there was a guileless bewilderment in her eyes as they met Charlotte's.

Charlotte indicated the very bulging pocket in question; then Paddy discovered it, and the letters too, with a surprised exclamation. They had come yesterday, most extraordinary thing how they'd slipped her mind. Then she sat down, lit a cigarette,

and, with narrowed eyes, watched Charlotte open the incriminating missives.

Charlotte was staggered. She was conscious, at first, only of a frightened dismay as to how she could make good the amounts that stared up at her. Then came the hot sweep of her anger against Paddy. Paddy had flagrantly upset the whole scheme of their life as she had so carefully worked it out! Paddy—But as she turned, the old feeling of helplessness overwhelmed her. How to reach Paddy in the treacherous quicksand of her deceit? But even as she hesitated, trembling, uncertain, Paddy took the initiative in all blitheness.

“Of course it’s all a joke,” she said, and, putting back her head, laughed shrilly to prove it.

“Are you sure?” asked Charlotte, in a low voice. She had some vague idea of fighting Paddy with her own weapons, of tricking her into confession.

“Dear me, yes! I have the receipts, all of them, in my bag,” answered Paddy, promptly. “I’m very careful, you know.”

“Receipts for cash payments?” asked Charlotte.

“Well—so to speak,” came back Paddy, nothing daunted. “I have the shopkeepers’ word, you see—”

“In your bag?” pressed Charlotte.

That *was* a joke which Paddy greeted with hilarity. Charlotte, herself, smiled a little, seeing

the absurdity of the method she had blundered into. Of course Paddy enjoyed to the full being driven into ridiculous corners.

Strange to say, in this little bicker, all of Charlotte's animosity toward Paddy had become dissipated. As she stood looking down at her, the shifting glint of her eyes, the unsteadiness of the fluttering hands, the thin stoop of the shoulders wrapped tightly in an old dirty shawl, forced home their tragic message. Paddy was not responsible.

"Paddy," she said, and her voice was full of a passionate pity, "why don't you tell me the truth?"

But Paddy showed herself still capable of evasion and murmured of a hole in the pocket of her new eleven-dollar coat. "The money must have slipped out. Now, just fancy, Charley, I have had that coat only—"

"Don't, Paddy!" Charlotte interrupted, this time bitterly. "You spent that money. Is n't the allowance I give you for yourself, for—for your wants, enough?"

"Oh, plenty, plenty!" cried Paddy, affably. "Very generous, very generous, I'm sure!"

"Is it enough?" Charlotte pressed her again.

Paddy hesitated. Then, "No," she brought out waveringly.

"Very well," said Charlotte. "Then I'll manage somehow to give you more, if you'll promise—"

Promise! She was brought up short with the nice irony of that word, but Paddy had already committed herself. She promised, solemnly, on her honor. Albeit, Charlotte went about, herself, to see the shopkeepers, to insist that credit be stopped. Dirty, suspicious, wily creatures they were without exception. How under the heavens did Paddy manage it, Charlotte asked herself continually as she went the rounds. "No credit!" "Cash only!" The very signs shrieked out distrust of the world at large. Truly, Paddy was possessed of the devil of circumvention!

There followed a tiresome week for Charlotte, when she learned much in regard to the etiquette of barter as observed by second-hand dealers. She disposed of a number of things that they had in storage, "which makes the storage bill so much less" she remarked with grim humor to Paddy.

Matters were adjusted in the end, however, and Charlotte and Paddy fell back into their former routine. Paddy brought home each day elaborate receipts of her purchases and left them on Charlotte's easel. At the end of each was scribbled a little reflection of Paddy's own. She started off rather in the personal vein, "A good woman is an abomination unto the Lord"; but after that she contented herself with the impersonal, achieving epigrams that would have delighted La Rochefoucauld, or delving into

philosophy of Aurelian vein. Charlotte's amusement, which she showed frankly, was a certain compensation to Paddy for her daily honesty. It was rather a jolly pastime, of the nature of a new and absorbing game.

In February George Baird shot himself. Paddy had come in breathless one day, with the paper.

"Poor dear George! The only decent thing he ever did in his life. Yes—right there! Oh, no—here! Did you ever see such a picture? Fancy, though—he actually had the courage to do it! I never thought—"

Charlotte read the account to the end with a strange indifference. She felt no sorrow for this man she had once thought to be her father, and pretended to none. Why should she? His conduct to Paddy had been, perhaps, after all, justifiable, but that realization in no way softened her mood. Later, when the will was probated, she ignored it, but Paddy insisted on reading it aloud. According to the will, which had been made ten years before, the bulk of the fortune, amounting to several million dollars, was to go "to my dearly beloved son, Philip Petherbridge Baird."

This, Paddy announced to Charlotte, was really a great sell on Philip because, don't you see, now there was n't any money left. "Yesterday's ticker

am I," quoted Paddy and then wound up, not unkindly, "Poor, stupid George!"

So the winter passed with little to distinguish one day from another. Dolly and Roger remained Charlotte's sole friends, but Paddy added fresh ones to her list every day. Charlotte was continually surprising some new person there for tea. Strange, perverted creatures for the most part, all of a certain damaged genius, like Paddy.

"Where do you find them, Paddy?" she asked curiously one day.

"Under lamp-posts generally!" came back Paddy, confidentially.

There was one thing Paddy's stray friends all seemed to have in common. In whatever status of life they had started out, they had all succeeded in sinking to a lower one. Charlotte refused stolidly to face the possibility of a bond of more insidious nature.

The descent of man was an absorbing study to Paddy. Charlotte, too, found a strange interest in these derelicts of fortune and was willing to overlook the alarming quantities of bread and butter they consumed at a polite sitting, for the sake of the grotesque tales of tragi-comedy they had to offer. But Paddy tired of her friends very quickly, giving them the gate, as it were, after two or three canters

about the ring; thus Charlotte was never exposed to the boredom of seeing any one person too frequently.

If, however, people had but a transitory interest for Paddy, she was constant and true in her devotion to animals. Some melancholy mongrel was always being brought home for a bone, or a waif of a kitten for a saucer of milk. Charlotte could be firm, though, when it came to the suggestion of a permanent pet. She was glad to offer the vagrants of the neighborhood temporary food and shelter, but a cat or dog of their own! "Certainly not!" she said decisively and persisted in her refusal for all Paddy's yearning looks and sentimental sighings.

Then Boule de Suif had come into their lives,—poor, dirty, bedraggled, black little thing that she was! Paddy had found her one terribly stormy night in the gutter and had brought her home, all one dismal wet meow, with one tiny paw hurt and bleeding. It was that particular little paw that Boule de Suif had put out to Charlotte as Paddy effected an elaborate introduction. Artful Boule de Suif! Or was it simply, after all, that Paddy had coached her on the way upstairs?

At any rate Boule de Suif was added to the family circle without further parley and soon became a very important member of it. She constituted something for Paddy to talk *at* when Charlotte was not there; or, better still, something to talk *through* when Char-

lotte was present and Paddy was in disgrace and things were strained.

All in all, though, they lived their lives in a genial sort of comradeship. Paddy was unquestionably happy; so was Boule de Suif, and so, in a way, was Charlotte. Yet, as time went on, the realization was forced that her happiness was, after all, only a factitious one. For, deceive herself as she might, the horror of Paddy's disorder still persisted, thrusting itself relentlessly into her every thought, coloring her every mood. It was this with its haunting message of evil that made her restless, that drove her from one futile activity to another. Yet, what was there for her but a tacit condonement? She gave Paddy her allowance, knowing perfectly how it would be spent. She accepted her irregularities without comment. Meals were served at the oddest, most unexpected hours. Often on a dark winter's morning Charlotte would be aroused at six o'clock to find breakfast on the table and Paddy berating her as a sluggard. At other times she got nothing before going to the League except what she hurriedly prepared herself. As to dinner, nine, ten, eleven—it didn't matter to Paddy; time was an arbitrary thing, anyhow. There were periods when Paddy kept her room two or three days at a stretch. Charlotte let her alone. The impression of that evil look she had surprised in Paddy's eyes on that

fateful night had proved an ineradicable one. Charlotte never could bring herself to set foot in the little alcove bedroom. During Paddy's lapses Charlotte was a prey to the most sickening depression. She got her meals sometimes, but the sight of that closed door usually drove her out and she resorted to the cheap restaurants of the district. She walked miles or sat in the park or rode in the 'bus as far as she could and then came back. On days when it was too stormy to brave the elements she sat, turned away from that door, and tried to paint; the results were ludicrous.

Then Paddy would appear quite unexpectedly and artlessly suggest it was time for dinner. If hours meant nothing to Paddy, days meant less. But there was a queer little expression on Paddy's face after these lapses,—a smug, satisfied little expression as of one who has successfully put something over on somebody else. This irritated Charlotte, but she soon lost sight of her irritation in her attempts at coaxing Paddy to eat. For Paddy was weak from lack of food, and she was shaky and feeble.

Poor Paddy! So she lived her life, her moments of joyful soaring, of brilliant ascendancy bought dearly with the misery of her resurgent craving. Yet, for all her suffering, Paddy considered that she had struck a very good bargain with her treacher-

ous familiar, and in her mistaken, perverted way was happy.

But Charlotte in the sharpness of her agonized perception realized the tragic extent of the penalty Paddy was paying for her folly. It was the strange mingling of pity with her horror that seemed to Charlotte at times the thing she could not endure.

In May Charlotte had an attack of the grippe. Perhaps their irregular way of living had told on her splendid constitution at last! With her illness came her first reaction from their shoddy mode of life. Hitherto, she had accepted without question the change in their circumstances. She had adapted herself unconsciously to necessity, her mind ever busy with the complexities of her larger problems. But now each forced economy irked, each inconvenience aggravated her mood of irritable discontent. Her mind reverted bitterly to the last time she had been ill, when she was a child at Idle Ease. The charming room, the dainty trays, the nurse, soft-footed and coolly white, the flowers on her dressing-table! And now Charlotte dragged herself out of bed each day, for the living-room where she slept was at the mercy of the janitor and the iceman and the delivery boys. She dressed while Paddy made up the couch, then she threw herself wearily upon it again with a dirty steamer rug over her. And

always the room was hot and the light from the skylight hurt her eyes and Paddy chattered unceasingly and Boule de Suif jumped all over her. The janitress gossiped tediously at the door and the grocery boy made pert jokes with Paddy. Some one suggested a doctor, but to have a stranger prying into the disorders of their household seemed to Charlotte the last agony. She refused point-blank. The food Paddy concocted was not of the simple sort to tempt an invalid, so Charlotte lived for the most part on orange juice.

It was a terrible ten days of racking pains and fever and a sickening weakness. Dolly had come one day and brought champagne, but the ice was low, so it tasted stale and tepid. Ten days! They dragged a slow, interminable length. However, the pains and aches subsided gradually. Not so Charlotte's discontent! To get away, to get away, out in the country somewhere; that desire obsessed her to the exclusion of every other thought. To get away, yes, and by herself! It came down to that; she wanted to get away from Paddy.

She asked Paddy for her bank-book one day. "And a piece of paper and a pencil." But there were no pencils sharpened. In her attempts to sharpen one with the carving-knife, Paddy cut her finger. Charlotte bandaged it up; after that she was too weak to follow out her figuring.

Then Dolly came to the front with a happy suggestion. Their camp in the Adirondacks for a month! Why not? It was always open—

Why not indeed? The thought was of tonic effect. Charlotte turned to Paddy.

“How about it, Paddy?” she asked. “We could go, don’t you think?” She had an overwhelming sense of guilt at the lack of conviction in that “we.” Paddy’s eyes met hers. Charlotte felt herself reddening.

“I?” cried Paddy. “Darling child, what are you thinking of? I couldn’t possibly leave *Boule de Suif*.” She turned, gaily chattering to Dolly of indiscretions in which *Boule de Suif*, if left alone, might all inadvertently become involved. “You see, *I* argue with her,” Paddy explained. “I—” But her thoughts were obviously wandering. In the nervous restlessness of her eyes as they now came back to Charlotte’s, Charlotte read, not the hurt resentment she had expected but an eager, tremulous, excited joy. It was with a pang Charlotte understood. If the month was to be a relief for her from the irk of Paddy’s presence, it was to be no less the gayest holiday for Paddy. There was the nicest justice in it, of course, but Charlotte, as she turned and closed an acceptance with Dolly, was miserably, pathetically, unaware of it.

The first of June found Charlotte ready to go.

She had recovered her old vigor and with it a certain optimism. More than that, she was excited, tremendously so. "I feel as I felt the day of my first circus," she said, amused at her own ebullience. As she packed her trunk, she talked gaily to Paddy, planning this and that, now for Paddy, now for herself. The awnings she had ordered for the windows were promised for the next day. Paddy would be more comfortable with that scorching afternoon sun shut out. And, remember—Charlotte emphasized this—the things were paid for. She left addressed envelopes that Paddy might write her every day.

"I should hate to put it up to the Adirondack postmaster to make out *your* scrawl, Paddy," she said. Paddy liked to be reminded that her chirography was eccentric. "I'm taking all my good dresses, Paddy," she rambled on. "No dirty smocks, thank you. I intend to—how is it the English say it?—swank up every night to impress the Laurence domestics. Picture me, all by myself, evening dress, satin slippers! Just fancy, I haven't *seen* a satin slipper for a year."

Yes, Charlotte was undeniably excited. She was glad of this; in excitement would she find the rest she so sadly needed. She took a taxi to the station, and bought her ticket and a section with a sense of satisfied recklessness. She had on one of her

Paris suits and felt she looked well. She engaged in talk with an intelligent woman next to her, a woman just back from Europe, now running up to her mountain camp for a brief rest before her daughter's wedding. The man across the aisle was talking of his place in Lenox and his hunting-dogs. The white coat of the colored porter walking quietly back and forth was almost too spotless. Charlotte breathed a deep sigh, and settled back in her chair. The dingy little studio with its dirty sofa pillows and cobwebby skylight seemed very, very far away. So did poor untidy Paddy, and the unregenerate Boule de Suif. Charlotte felt herself once more a part of that well-dressed, well-ordered world called Society, that runs at random over to Paris, up to the mountains, down to Palm Beach; that world of white-winged yachts and country places and extravagance and opportunity.

But Charlotte's first sense of easy exhilaration at this renewal of old contacts soon flagged. As she had told Dolly, she was out of it; that life was no longer her life. It was because of this, because she knew all too definitely the limitations of poverty, that now she could appreciate the more the power and lure of wealth. She thought of the crowded little studio, then of the cool spaces of Idle Ease. And those far-distant vivid lands that Paddy had known she would never know. Yes, money was

power; a tragic truth. Then, by the light of this new interpretation, she began to see Dolly, still a soft, blue-eyed little thing, but with a cruel scepter of might in her weak, uncertain hand. The image was disconcerting; Charlotte tried to shut it out and went to bed.

She thought of Paddy; perhaps her depression was but a form of homesickness. The train, plunging through the blackness, made of her mind an inchoate confusion. But through it all that new image of Dolly persisted,—vague adumbration, perhaps, of some tragic to-morrow. She fell asleep at last, tired out, perplexed, despairing of she knew not what.

The camp, designated by Buchanan as his “shack in the mountains,” was more complete and luxurious than Charlotte had imagined it. She had seen pictures of it in the magazines, but this! It was one of those half-stone, wing-extended houses, terraced at different levels to the slope of the mountain, and looking off into a splendid openness. Striking example, it furnished, in that fastness, of what money can do in the defiance of mere nature.

Within the great hall a barbaric note was struck, in the immensity of the fireplace, in the gallery above from the balustrade of which hung bright rugs and warm tapestries, in the old spears and swords and hunting-trophies about the walls. Yet, making terms with these relics of feudal splendor, were all

the deep upholstered comforts that the lounging generation of to-day considers indispensable. The whole effect of the place made for luxurious irresponsibility.

Charlotte's first exhilaration of the day before was as nothing to her present state of rapture. The housekeeper liked her enthusiasm; the footman, in informal livery, who brought her tea on the terrace, had a genial countenance. She had a hot bath before dinner; she had forgotten water could be really hot. Then she gazed raptly at the view from her window, dressed herself with care, sat in each comfortable chair for a minute or two, and finally went down to dinner. "We dine informally," the housekeeper had told her, but it seemed a mighty function to Charlotte. Coffee and a liqueur on the veranda! Then the moon began to rise.

Charlotte breathed deeply. Life again was beautiful and wholesome and fresh as the pungent fragrance of the pines in her nostrils, as the pure vigor of the air in her lungs. Her febrile fancies of the preceding night were forgotten and she was possessed of a blessed content. She closed her eyes and rested.

The next afternoon, after a day of supreme indolence she climbed the highest peak of the range to see the sunset. So utterly out of the world she seemed as she stood there, half-way between heaven

and earth. Ridge on ridge, purple, shadowy, stretched to the far horizon, and above it all the vast quiet of the splendid sky, lit by the rays of the setting sun. The glorious entombment of another day! Charlotte stood there rapt, tremulous, in quivering response to the beauty, the sublimity of that gorgeous ritual. And so, by one of those accidents that make of life the proverbial thing far stranger than any fiction, Roger Canby found her. He, too, had been a lonely watcher of that sunset, but he had turned from it with a restless sigh. It was then he had seen Charlotte. He uttered a little exclamation that she echoed, startled, as she turned to him. Then, with the warm light of that dying day in their eyes, they smiled at each other their quickened pleasure.

PART V

PART V

CHAPTER XVI

IT is impossible to trace the phases by which Charlotte and Roger passed from the wonder and marvel of mutual discovery to the eventual acceptance of each other as big and splendid facts. As Charlotte found herself smiling into Roger's eyes, the night of their first meeting, there came to her the sharp sense of a situation too dramatic to be quite free of complication. The nature of the complication Charlotte faced unflinchingly in the days that followed. She was romantic; she realized that perfectly, but so circumscribed by sordid event had she been of late that her early dreams had been forgotten. There was the greater danger, therefore, in the sudden awakening of her former self, in this stir of old desires so long suppressed. Charlotte wanted romance, she wanted love, life's supreme experience, the more passionately for the realization of that other tragic claim upon her.

During Charlotte's illness not the least part of her depression had lain in the fact that the League

had closed, that she might never see Roger again. Vague formless regrets of a relation of unfulfilled promise! Yet she had tried to tell herself it was better so; the fewer contacts, the less likely her schedule of existence to be disturbed. Then suddenly, by disconcerting accident, here they were, away up, splendidly alone, caught in the glow of the setting sun. Charlotte's greeting was a tremulous one. They said very little that night, but met the next morning as if their meeting had in it a certain necessity.

Charlotte's happiness was an unsteady, confused sort of thing. In those first few days she learned facts and took impressions without any real assimilation of them. Roger was staying at a farmhouse in the neighborhood; he and his mother had spent their summers there always, so the district was an open book to him. They walked miles, following old difficult trails or making new ones. Gradually, as they walked and climbed and talked, Roger became to Charlotte more than a vague tormenting presence; he became a man, bronzed and slim and supple. His brown thick hair, cut short, showed the fine narrow framework of his skull. His mouth was firm but sensitive as a woman's. His eyes—it was in his eyes, in the contemplation of that strange light struggling with the gray shadows that Charlotte was at last to come to an under-

standing of the real Roger. Roger was singularly untried and emotionally undeveloped. It was this lack of development, this innocence, and the peculiar defenselessness it entailed that was to constitute his greatest appeal to Charlotte. The matter of Dolly and the horse show all over again!

So Charlotte's uncertainty, her tremulous doubts soon fell away from her and she saw her way all too startlingly clear. It was for her to protect Roger against that world of which he knew nothing, that world of which she herself with her tragic entanglements was a part. With the clear realization that she was in love with Roger, that she had been in love with him during the whole of their brief intercourse of the winter, there came also a clear resolve. Roger must never know. Still, if that light in Roger's eyes should burn free of its veil of shadows—She faced the warm vision of that and her senses throbbed. But she could not take refuge behind the pretense of a force stronger than her will, for she knew perfectly that by reason of her sophistication it was for her to set the final stamp on the relation. A fine and splendid friendship! She put it on that plane and forced herself to content. She and Roger were extraordinarily congenial, taking a ready zest in each other.

Charlotte came to realize that she was in all probability Roger's first real friend; for his life, as

he told her of it, had been singularly free of outside contacts. He had never been to school or college. His mother had taught him, then, later, some relative, a professor in Harvard. His sojourn abroad had been of too short duration to enable him to seek out friends; since his mother's death his work had sufficed. A simple little chronicle; yet, strange to say, it was only Roger's emotional development that had suffered. His mind was of a remarkable maturity. He had ideas about everything, decisive opinions which he was able to defend with the clearest logic. Charlotte didn't have a chance when it came to an argument. This delighted her. Often, in a frivolous mood, she resorted to the most fantastic fallacies, showing something of Paddy's adroit ingenuity in supporting them. Roger's hearty laugh provoked her to ridiculous absurdities. Roger's quick sense of humor was not the least of his charm. So they ran the gamut from the serious to the gay with unexpected surprises and amusing reversals. Not a topic escaped them. Love, marriage! Charlotte kept her eyes calm and steady, her voice cool.

"Love!—love should be a thing of gossamer mists, shadowy, mystical. Romance, true romance, is of the spirit."

Roger shook his head. "Then what of marriage?"

"Ah, marriage!" Charlotte let herself go. Mar-

riage was a practical bargain, an economic relation sanctioned by the police. Marriage and love were two different things.

She did n't believe it. He knew it and told her so. But she clung to her argument.

"Marriage is too real!"

"Realities can be beautiful and tender," he said. She could not meet this. It was just that—the desire for realities, beautiful and tender—that she was fighting so passionately.

Charlotte had taken Roger, that first night, back to the camp to have dinner with her. After that they lunched and dined together every day. The table was laid for two without question. Charlotte had an idea that something of the sort was expected by the servants, from the beginning. Solitude is sweet, yes! But in that solitude give me yet one person to whom I may murmur, "Solitude is sweet." The guests at the Laurence camp were fairly consistent in observing the code. So Roger's presence caused no comment whatsoever.

Roger was as naïve and enthusiastic in his appreciation of the place as Charlotte had been. The esthetic in him responded to its warm harmonies and nice proportions; the extravagant comforts filled him with an amused indolence. They confessed to each other that they adored luxuries and sat about, smiling contentedly. There were books, books

everywhere, and they took to reading aloud, a half-hour here and there. Their tastes differed, just enough to open up interesting vistas of possible discussion. Roger read poetry so well Charlotte refused to enter the lists. For the most part they kept outdoors in the open sunshine or in the shadow-flecked woods. But there were days when they were shut in by deluges of mountain rain. Those were the days when they were most keenly aware of each other. Their intimacy was of so intense a quality that it provoked a dangerous restlessness. They piled logs and more logs upon the fire till its great roar outdid the mountain blasts. They looked ever and again through the windows at the desolate sweep of rain-driven ridges, then they came back to their fireside warmth. Charlotte made Roger read to her; she made him play to her. She loved Roger's music, it made her think of Hendy's. Strange, weird fantasies he played, with a surprising strength of touch. And there was always a queer haunting restlessness of motif. Erik Satie, Debussy! Roger liked to play and played indefinitely when she urged him. "Voiles," "Pagodes," "Ogives," "Gnossiennes," occasionally a Chopin prelude. His repertoire was varied, but it was the modern French with its magic of dissonance that he came back to every time.

"Golliwogg's Cake-Walk," Paddy's favorite bit of Debussy—he knew that, too.

There were times when Charlotte wanted to talk to Roger of Paddy but, somehow, she did not know where to begin. Paddy was a part of that world of which Roger was unaware; Paddy was a part of that world she must go back to very soon. Yes, very soon. The strange cadences of Roger's music seemed the confusion of her own heart. Roger, too, at times became silent and depressed. It was then Charlotte was able to rouse herself to lighten his mood with gay banter and trivial frivolity. Or, surer method still, she set up his easel by the window, pulled back the heavy draperies, and insisted that he work. Yes, Roger's work was his life. No matter how reluctant or diffident he was when he began, once started he forgot everything else, even Charlotte herself, as she realized with a certain grim amusement. Roger's painting was of the same genre as his music,—impressionistic, strange, haunting. He worked with a quick, nervous intensity as if eager to capture some inner vision before it faded, some vision of a fantastic beauty, of a more fantastic sadness.

Charlotte, as she sat and watched him at his work, forced herself to content. A difficult mood to sustain, however, when one is young and ardent and in love. As time wore on, Charlotte realized the pitiful mockery of it. The joy of self-sacrifice is a dull sort of compromise with an eager passion.

She knew what she wanted; she wanted Roger to take her in his arms, she wanted Roger to kiss her. Because she knew her love was the love rooted in a fine understanding she was not ashamed of her desire. As Roger had said, realities can be tender and beautiful. So, she admitted, her passion was there, a strange haunting solicitude to fill each hour of the day, a dull urgency in the endless hours of the night.

It is evidence of the fine quality of Charlotte's supreme unselfishness that, for all the pain of her struggle, she did not once falter in the course she had marked out for herself. Roger never guessed her feelings. She made one concession to her weakness and only one. At the end of the month she decided to stay longer. So she lingered until the moon she had watched rise that first night had waxed and waned and another had risen in its place. Then her summons came, a letter from Paddy. Paddy's scrawls had come at fairly regular intervals. When there had been a lull of longer duration, Charlotte had been unaware of it. Paddy had written that she was happy; that was sufficient. But now—it was exactly the sort of thing Charlotte should have expected; she had n't, however.

Paddy had spent all her money, it was most amazing how money did go, and had been forced to run up a few little bills, her object being to spare Charlotte any unnecessary worry during her vacation.

And now the trades-gentlemen were showing their teeth! Could Charlotte send her more money? Or was n't it about time Charlotte herself returned? Nature was all right for a setting or an upsetting, so Paddy wound up, "but, darling child, I should think you 'd be bored to death up there by yourself; nothing but the mountains to gossip with and about."

Charlotte got her letter at breakfast. She read it, then went out on the terrace and sat down. In her heart was a slow resentment, not against Paddy in particular, but against the world that had broken in upon her happiness. As her resentment grew there grew also the determination to keep that happiness unsullied, apart, free of vulgar contacts. It was too beautiful to her, too sacred to be reduced to the acquiescence of daily commonplace. She would go away without telling Roger; she would not leave her address. She saw this as sentimental, the act of a romantic school-girl, but she did not care. She wanted only, passionately, blindly, to keep her dream untouched, her own.

Roger found her a little later, very quiet, with a deeper glow in her steady eyes. There was a peculiar wistful quality in that last day. They said very little, but they had never seemed more perfectly attuned. A new element of intentness had crept into Roger's eyes. Charlotte had a sharp wonder.

She dressed herself for dinner in her loveliest

gown, a frothy lace thing, the color of a fading gardenia, that threw into striking relief her brilliant eyes and dark hair. The image her glass gave back disconcerted her. Dinner was gay; she prolonged it consciously. Then they went down to the lowest terrace and seated themselves on a stone bench to watch the moon. What they said to each other mattered little; perhaps they did not talk at all. Charlotte remembered afterward only the beauty of the scene,—the shadowy mountains, ridge on ridge; the pale, white wonder of the moon. They sat there for hours and hours with a sense of magic unreality. Charlotte's thoughts settled to a strange calm. The day was over; it had been exactly what she had wanted it to be. She was satisfied. Yet, as she tried to rouse herself to leave, the old wistfulness of desire crept over her. She closed her eyes and sighed a little. Then as she opened them she turned her head to Roger. He was looking at her, a smile in his eyes. He bent forward and placed his lips on hers for one fleeting second, a strange, fantastic, light little kiss, all a part of the spell of that silvery night. They smiled at each other; then Charlotte turned away, a surge of tears in her heart. A second later rising, she gave him a cool and steady hand and they climbed together up the slope.

"To-day has been the best of all," she said simply as they stood at the door. He was still holding her

hand that lay passive in his. She knew that he expected to come in; he always came in for one last lingering cigarette. He stood there irresolute, the light in his eyes growing brighter and brighter. It was the moment for Charlotte's supreme sacrifice. She drew her hand from his.

"To-morrow," she said lightly.

Roger sighed unconsciously as he echoed her "To-morrow!"

She turned and entered the big door they had left open. She could not trust herself to look at him again as he stood there, the shadows in his eyes still lifting. She brought the door to with a bang of dismal finality. But she laughed and called out a cheerful goodnight through the casement. Then, turning, she rushed hastily upstairs to her own room, where she threw herself on her knees at the window. Yes, there he was, a slim figure against the moonlight! He had hesitated a second. His eyes swept the glorious scene spread out before him, then came back with sudden intentness to the house. Charlotte was crying softly now; she tried to check herself lest he should hear. A minute later, he turned and walked away toward the woods. As their shadows enveloped him, Charlotte gave one long hard sob, then broke to an unrestrained weeping.

CHAPTER XVII

IT was to a distinctly unbeautiful reality that Charlotte was destined to awake, the reality of financial stress. Paddy had become hopelessly involved in her six weeks of freedom. Some of the old shopkeepers had been won to fresh credit, new ones sought out and cajoled. There were even, most surprising of all, cash advancements. The awnings had been sent back as unsatisfactory, the money paid on them claimed and spent. Charlotte was desperate. The week following her return was a week of intolerable mortification and unpleasant argument. She did n't have the money, that was all there was to it, so her creditors at last consented with grumbling reluctance to give her time. The first of July, no later! She won her point at the expense of pride. She ignored Paddy during all her negotiations. She could not bring herself to leniency, but, on the other hand, she could not bring herself to anger. Paddy looked ill and was a ghastly color.

Charlotte had had some vague plan of saving out of her next quarterly enough to take her and Paddy

to some cheap watering-place for part of the summer at least. Now, there was nothing for it but to stay where they were, to endure the long drag of hot weeks as best they could. Those first days in the dirty, stuffy little studio were perhaps the worst for Charlotte. The blinding glare of the afternoon sun as it poured in upon them made her feel sick and weak. The place was in fearful condition, so, for all the heat, she got to work. Perhaps, when a little order had been brought out of the confusion, she might adapt herself with less protest. She swept the rugs and scrubbed the paint. She cleaned out the kitchenette and sent off the laundry, neglected for weeks. The heat continued day after day. Charlotte had never been in a city during the warm weather and had no idea what she was in for. Air, some pure air,—it was that she wanted, but how to get it? It was too hot to walk on the steaming asphalt; the herds of waiting people roped off in the park made an attempt at a 'bus ride a farce. Once or twice she made a despairing effort to get to a beach, only to turn around at the crowded railway station and come home. Dolly was in Newport, so not one vision of green things was permitted her, not one breath of sweet-smelling air. She became apathetic, lost even her ambition to keep the studio in condition, so let it go. She gave up her painting; the smell of the paint nauseated her. She touched

scarcely any food. There was nothing for it but to lie back, panting, and wait till the heat had spent itself. And all the while the noise of children's voices outside,—querulous, complaining,—and the smell of decaying fruit! Occasionally a hurdy-gurdy would strike up. And Paddy chattered on and on.

Poor Charlotte! Everything pointed so cruelly the truth she already knew too well. Paddy was her life; to Paddy and the shoddy reality of their existence together must her every dream be sacrificed. But, even had Paddy not been there, the stark fact of poverty would have presented itself to be reckoned with. Charlotte knew that Roger had no money and guessed shrewdly his lack of practical insight. What would their dream have come to, caught in circumstances like this? How could their love have survived, with every generous instinct bruised and crushed, each inspiration doomed to perish miserably? Canned goods and the flies and the hot sun!

Very often Charlotte would get up in the night to sit by the window, where occasionally a breath of air would reach her. At such times the bitterness of her thoughts would give place to a sad, wistful sort of happiness. She would go over slowly and with a great tenderness each detail of the weeks she and Roger had spent together. She thought of his eyes, the whimsical little kiss. She thought of him

at his work. It was then, as she visualized him at his easel, that she could find a certain joy in her renunciation. And if—if it should be that some day she was to see Roger again, she would go on as she had begun. She would protect him in his work, and in the achievement of his higher vision she would find just compensation for her sacrifice.

Strangely enough, Paddy was perfectly unconscious of the struggle through which Charlotte passed that summer. Paddy, herself, had a beautiful time; the heat seemed to bother her not at all. She played solitaire for hours at a stretch with two packs of unspeakably dirty cards. One pack was for herself, the other for Boule de Suif, who sat up on the table opposite, head on one side, paw raised reflectively. Fortunes were made and lost recklessly, and once or twice Boule de Suif was caught cheating.

Then Paddy read exhaustively. She had discovered a little library near by; the librarian, a fascinating man, allowed her carte blanche. The hotter the day, the greater the number of tomes Paddy lugged home. French, Italian, Spanish,—a brilliant array! Charlotte had even surprised a book in Yiddish one day.

"Do you read Yiddish, Paddy?" she asked in dry amusement.

"Of course!" answered Paddy with a fine hauteur, and sat down for an hour with the great heavy

thing in her trembling hands to prove her point.

She was constantly reading Italian and French aloud to Charlotte lest she lose her accent. And as for poetry,—to make Charlotte spot random couplets seemed to Paddy the ideal sport for a hot afternoon.

Then one day in August, a little sultrier than any day yet, Charlotte received a letter from Dolly, a cool, fragrant missive that seemed out of place in the stifling room. Dolly wanted her portrait painted and her father had suggested Charlotte for the commission. Could Charlotte come to them in September at Laurence Park? At any other time a line from Dolly would have been a happy diversion. But now, this offer seemed the last mockery of her need. Money! The money Dolly squandered in one day would have insured Charlotte her life's happiness.

She sat there, brooding miserably. The letter slipped to the floor; Paddy picked it up and read it.

"You'll do it, of course!" she chirped gaily.

Charlotte resented this.

"I'm not so sure," she said sullenly.

"Of course, you could charge an outrageous price," Paddy said persuasively. "Buchanan would n't care. Besides, you'd meet a lot of people out there."

"I don't want to meet people," Charlotte said sharply.

Paddy nodded her head sagely.

"Darling child, there's no need of dodging facts just because it happens to be a hot day. You've *got* to marry—"

Charlotte's anger flared, only to die out on the instant to a weary despair.

"Don't let's talk about *that* now, Paddy," she said with a sigh. "Have we anything cold to drink?"

Paddy was diverted on the instant. There had been tea left over from lunch, but it was now discovered that all the ice was melted. Then Paddy broke a glass and Charlotte scolded her irritably.

Charlotte started at last to get up and change her dress for the afternoon. She wanted to take a bath, but the litter of dishes waiting to be washed in the bath-room discouraged her. So she sank back into her chair. After all, why change? It seemed a farce to keep up appearances in that dirty little place.

Paddy had picked up an "Antony and Cleopatra" now and was making herself altogether ridiculous. She always reacted to Charlotte's low spirits in just this way. She skipped about here and there, her voice militant or amorous to suit the passage.

"Die were thou hast lived;
Quicken with kissing; had my lips that power,
Thus would I wear them out."

There was a pause. Paddy shook her head reflectively. "I wonder," she mused, "if there was anything wrong between Antony and Cleopatra."

Then she fell upon the drunken scene. As Charlotte's eyes were closed, she directed her histrionic efforts in the direction of *Boule de Suif*.

"'What manner o' thing is your crocodile? It is shaped, sir, like itself, and it is itself; it is broad as it hath breadth; it is just so high as it is, and moves with its own organs; it lives by that which nourisheth it, and the elements once out of it, it transmigrates. Of its own color, too! 'Tis a strange serpent and the tears of it are wet!'"

At this point Paddy's mirth burst into shrill hilarity, whereupon *Boule de Suif* turned a frisky somersault. Charlotte could stand it no longer. She rose abruptly, with some idea of going out into the park. The bell rang. One of the endless procession of delivery boys, she told herself. She touched the bell-click, then, just for something to 'do, she went out wearily to the top of the stairs. The echo of a voice in parley with the janitor, a slender hand on the balustrade below, and Charlotte started back in a panic of dismay. Roger! The dirty little studio, herself, Paddy! Confused, she rushed back to her door, only to return to the

head of the stairs, where she stood trembling, almost crying. The vision of that last beautiful night flashed clear. The thing was cruel, cruel. Roger had already come up two flights, the crazy stairs creaking at his every step. Charlotte drew a long, deep breath that shivered through her like a sob. Then she stood, quite ready and calm. Roger had turned and was starting up the last flight now.

"Ah!" his face brightened as he saw her. "I am so glad! I was afraid you might be out of town, in this heat, you know—"

"It *is* hot," Charlotte said as they shook hands.

"I got your address at the League office," he explained. "You forgot to leave it in your note—I am in town for the day on business—"

"You must come in and meet my mother." Charlotte's voice was hard.

She led him to the door and threw it open. "This is my mother," she said. "And Paddy, this is Mr. Canby, a student at the League—"

If the thing was unfair to Charlotte, it was equally unfair to Roger. He stood there for a second in the blaze of light and in his eyes was an unmistakable astonishment. Charlotte went to the windows, attempting to pull down the flapping shades, to soften the glare. Roger collected himself in a second and shook hands with Paddy,—Paddy with her wispy hair all about her, her untidy

'dress pinned at the neck with a safety-pin. Paddy looked at him shrewdly, nodded, then introduced Boule de Suif in all seriousness.

"She is shaped, sir, like herself," she proceeded in mock earnestness. "She moves with her own organs; she lives by that which nourisheth her and the elements once out of her—"

Charlotte made no explanation; she made no apology. She knew Roger was perfectly justified in his astonishment, but she resented it, nevertheless, resented it hotly. The smile on her face hardened. Instantly the aggressive side of her that had asserted itself to protect Paddy on that eventful visit of the Comtesse de Ferraud asserted itself now, but this time to protect herself. She struck a cynical note and prolonged it, quite at her ease. She flaunted herself, worldly, sophisticated, destructive. Roger was at a loss and showed to little advantage. He had come to seek Charlotte out in a frankly admitted eagerness; perhaps, after all, business had been but an excuse. He had not defined to himself what he had expected; he knew only that he wanted to see her again. His spirits flagged the minute he entered the room. He was bewildered, depressed, face to face with something he could not understand. Small wonder, then, he had little to say and floundered hopelessly. Paddy saw his weakness, jumped in and poked fun at him, exposing his every remark

to ridicule. Boule de Suif took the cue and was pert and objectionable. Paddy very elaborately presented them all with some tepid tea. Roger stirred his vaguely, and ever and again he came back to the days he and Charlotte had spent together in the mountains. Paddy wagged her head and drew him on. And once he intercepted a cunning wink Paddy had meant for Charlotte.

Oh, it was a disaster, hot, muddled, tragic! Roger rose at last.

"I am coming back the first of October," he said in a limp voice. "I have taken a studio on the south side of the Square."

"We shall be neighbors," Charlotte said evenly. "That will be very nice."

He had taken her hand as he said good-by, but his eyes rested on Paddy.

Then in casual small talk they had gone out to the stairs. The janitress was doing some belated scrubbing. Roger stepped over a pail and a mop. Charlotte stood at the head of the stairs and watched him. At the foot of the first flight he looked up and smiled at her vaguely. She waved; then, turning, she made her way slowly back to the room. Paddy was waiting for her, with arms akimbo and a crafty look in her eyes. She wagged her head.

"How long, pray," she asked with mock severity, "has this illicit thing been going on?"

Charlotte stood trembling for a minute. Then, breaking into harsh sobs, she threw herself on the couch and buried her face in the dirty pillows.

Paddy and Boule de Suif exchanged a glance with a world of wicked wisdom in it.

"'T is a strange creature," muttered Paddy, "and the tears of it are wet."

Two weeks later Roger made another trip to the city. Again on the pretext of business, but in reality to make amends to Charlotte for his behaving on the previous visit. He had betrayed with a boorish stupidity his dismay at her surroundings, his instinctive dislike of her mother, and he hated himself for it. But his uneasy restlessness had its root in a thing of deeper significance than mortification. Roger's feeling for Charlotte had been of a steady growth during the summer weeks, although he himself had not realized it. He had thought of her continually, her charm, her frankness, her fine beliefs; and he had visualized her always as she had been that last night in her gossamer dress of lovely lace, with a soft glow in her eyes. And now! But, after the brunt of the first shock had been sustained, it was not the externals that troubled him—the soiled smock, the tumbled hair—but the tragedy he had sensed in her eyes. Yes, tragedy of some sort was there, and sacrifice. It was Roger's first contact with a world complicated by sor-

did problems. He guessed the truth about Paddy, and his feeling for Charlotte, that had been up to now so simple and natural, became suddenly all a confused urgency.

Roger had been careful to telephone Charlotte before he called; that seemed only fair in the circumstances. It was part of her bravado that she met him with, "But why should you telephone? Drop in any time." Part of her bravado, too, that she should leave the dust in the studio undisturbed, and should don the same dirty smock. That sense of a beautiful thing spoiled forever had forced her to the hard acceptance of him on practical grounds. She made of their meeting a casual thing. Roger had brought Paddy some flowers, and exerted himself to be nice to her. However, no amount of careful pretense could hide his real feelings from Charlotte, and again she felt the dull ache of resentment.

They confined their talk almost entirely to business. Roger had obtained through the League some advertising commissions, sufficiently lucrative, he hoped, to keep him going. His mornings, however, he was planning to keep for his real painting. He was optimistic of outlook; the scheme should work very well. Charlotte asked him about his studio. It was big and barn-like, he said, but he did n't care. Paddy brought him down to details.

Was it heated? Roger did n't think it was, much, but the janitor had spoken in all cheerfulness of oil-stoves.

Paddy nodded sagely. "Have you ever been really cold?" she pressed.

Roger admitted he never had, but when he painted nothing else mattered.

Paddy shook her head.

"Don't plan on much inspiration," she said maliciously, "if you have to sit there with your fingers numb and an overcoat on."

The picture evoked by Paddy was not a cheerful one. Roger stared at it a minute with knitted brows. As Charlotte watched in his eyes the chilling of his bright courage, her resentment against him gave place to a quick sympathy. The peculiar quality of Paddy's blight she, herself, knew only too well. She smiled at him and for the first time the hard glint in her eyes softened to the old frank tenderness.

"Paddy does n't know your work, Roger, as I do," she said. "I can see you doing big things even in an adobe hut."

He looked at her gratefully. They were back now on their former grounds of understanding, and both felt a sudden exhilaration. In the sudden perception of Roger, too, as struggling with the everyday problems of existence Charlotte had seen

her way to the making of a solid friendship out of the shattered bits of her dream.

The conversation went at a quicker tempo after that. Charlotte told Roger of her commission to paint a friend.

"I'm to spend September at their Long Island home. Dolly Laurence! We've been friends from childhood. It will be wonderful to get away from this heat. I wish that Paddy might go, too—"

Paddy said the heat never bothered her. As witness of this last fact she pulled her old black shawl more tightly about her shoulders and proceeded to serve the hottest possible tea. The closeness of the room was almost unbearable as they sat there.

Then, suddenly, there was a gentle tap at the slightly open door and Dolly pushed her way in, most unexpected of apparitions. A lovely cool little figure, in a filmy white gown with a shimmery white plume in her hat. A touch of the freshest blue here and there brought out the loveliness of her eyes; the pearls about her neck matched the creamy whiteness of her skin. She stood there, faultless, fragile, expensive, the finished product of a plutocratic tradition. As she murmured of the janitor letting her come right up without ringing, her wide eyes had taken in Roger with a naïve appraisal of his good looks.

"We were just talking of you, Dolly," Charlotte

remarked after the introduction was achieved. "Mr. Canby is a painter, too. I was telling him about your portrait—"

Roger turned smiling, and studied Dolly with an eye to portrait points. Dolly took his scrutiny with a self-conscious satisfaction.

"Tea?" pressed Paddy. "Nice and hot!"

Dolly shook her head. "No, thank you. I've just come from Sherry's." Her eyes took in the disorder of the room. She began to fan herself, then looked at her watch.

"I have only a minute," she said. "I came down from Newport with father last night on the yacht. I had a few errands to do in town. We're going back this afternoon. What I wanted to tell you, Charlotte, was that Uncle Henry had a wire from Cass yesterday. He and Phil had just landed in San Francisco. So I'm having everybody for September. We ought to have a gay time."

Charlotte demurred.

"Oh, Dolly, I'd rather not! How can I paint if there are to be so many people?"

But Dolly was n't listening. She had turned to Roger, and was explaining.

"We were all in Paris together. Let's see, when was it, Charlotte?"

"Two years ago!" answered Charlotte, with a certain restraint.

"As much as that?" queried Dolly. "It does n't seem possible. So little has happened since—"

"As to that," put in Paddy, "nothing ever happens in this life, Dolly. What made you think things did?"

Dolly did n't meet this. She rose.

"Then I'll count on you, Charlotte."

"Yes," answered Charlotte, a little wearily.

Dolly turned to Roger.

"Perhaps Mr. Canby would join us!" she suggested.

"I'm afraid not!" Roger put in quickly. The thing was too informally done to suit him.

But Charlotte had a quick inspiration. The unexpected resentment she had felt at Dolly's cool presence gave way suddenly and she saw her as the good fairy with magic wand of light. A month at Laurence Park with Roger! A month to work out her new vision of friendship! It came as a blessed answer to her need. She turned to him impulsively.

"Could n't you possibly make it?" she asked, an intense earnestness in her eyes. "We could paint together—"

Ah, that was different! Roger looked at Dolly.

"Oh, if you will let me paint—"

The thing was settled in a minute, details arranged. Dolly showed her pleasure ingenuously.

"May I take you where you are going, Mr. Canby?" she asked. "My car is downstairs."

"That will be splendid," Charlotte answered for him as he again hesitated. They went out into the hall.

Dolly gave Charlotte a light, fragrant little kiss. Roger took her hand and held it an imperceptible second, as they smiled at each other. That was all, but Charlotte went back into the studio with a glow in her eyes and the sense of a happiness renewed.

CHAPTER XVIII

SHORTLY after his arrival in New York the following week Philip came to the little studio to see Paddy. Instantly the old animosity between brother and sister flared anew. Philip was heavier, more sullen, and looked distinctly the worse for dissipation. He was scandalized at the conditions under which he found them living and sneered at Charlotte for her lack of spirit. The change in Paddy he resented hotly, blamed Charlotte for that, too!

"Good God!" he cried. "She looks like any old tenement drudge! Why don't you look out for her?"

Charlotte's fine scorn of Philip and everything he stood for was her best line of defense. For the most part she went out whenever he arrived and left him with Paddy. She had a vague idea that the two of them were hatching up some nefarious scheme. What, she did not know. But, as to that, she did not care. Even the shadow of Philip's presence was not sufficient to dim the bright outlook of that September party. Charlotte's thoughts were all a

happy, confused anticipation. Then, before she realized it, September was upon them and the house-party was in full swing.

There was gathered together at Laurence Park a diversity of people. Philip, Cassimir, Tony Welch, several of Newport's younger matrons, two or three attachés, a Russian Prince, a few of Buchanan's own intimates. Charlotte, and Roger. Fortunately the Laurence establishment was run on a sufficiently large scale not to require the welding of tastes and codes. The guests were as independent of one another as if they had been in a New York hotel. They did as they pleased,—rode, drove, slept, played cards, or made love, each man to his whim. The Park lent itself to anything. It was a beautiful place, the house a massive pile of gray stone with extravagant terraces and sunken gardens. A view of the Sound was permitted at the front, through the artfully arranged screen of shrubs and trees; at the back were parks and woods, extensive enough to afford a jolly run with the pack. The tan-bark ring was one of the finest in the country; the stables, the cowbarns, the kennels, the garages were a village in themselves. The whole thing was gigantic, stupendous. Small wonder, then, the guests felt themselves in no way bound by the conventions that govern the average household. Responsibility simply did not exist at Laurence Park.

Dolly's sittings for Charlotte were few and far between. Charlotte could never arrange for definite appointments, so was forced to content herself with a sort of general study of expression, and a painting from memory. She loved the picture, however, as it grew under her brush, and confided to Roger that this was one picture she really hoped to finish.

"This is to be my chef d'œuvre," she told him, and believed it.

Those were wonderful days for Roger and Charlotte, when, taking their easels, they sought out some sequestered spot and gave themselves up to the bright enthusiasm of their work and each other. Roger was enchanted at everything. Laurence Park opened up a new world to him; he never ceased to marvel at its exquisiteness of detail, the harmony of its perfect whole. So many vistas there were to invite the eye with tantalizing suggestion that eventually Roger left the selection to Charlotte. She chose his point of view; then he set to work with a far-away look in his eyes. Roger's love of the beautiful seemed the very fibre of his being. Charlotte watched him with a certain quiet of resignation. No, Roger was not meant for sordid entanglements, the irk of the practical. And the dingy little studio with its note of sinister tragedy flashed across her mind ever and again and helped

her to sustain her attitude of a detached friendship.

Then, too, the other people in the party did exist,—in a remote sort of way of course, but even so they constituted a contact. It was extreme isolation that was dangerous. When the guests were all foregathered, Charlotte exerted herself as she had in the old Paris days, to dominate the company. She had little opposition, for the other women in the party were singularly amorphous. It was at dinner that Charlotte always shone her brightest. She loved the long table, the flowers and soft lights, the hum of voices, the eager eyes. There was something about it all that made her reckless, that drove her on to score at any cost. She was vivid and forceful; destructive, too, for the most part. She attacked everything,—the theater, current fiction, convention, and, most drastically of all, the moneyed class. She declared herself a radical, a socialist, and stuck to it. Buchanan and his friends delighted in her every word and reacted to her energetic attacks with an uproarious admiration.

“Of course, I represent the laboring man,” she announced decisively. “Money! I hate it! I hate its power. But I want it; oh, yes, I want it!” Her inconsistencies were not the least of her charm. A handsome acquisition to any dinner-table she was.

Philip watched her with a growing resentment that she had not used her ability to greater advantage.

For the most part, however, Philip was too busy with Dolly to think of anything else.

Roger studied Charlotte in this new phase with a quiet intentness, but he seemed not at all disturbed.

He put it to her, laughing, one day as they sat painting: "You hide your real self so cleverly; you might almost convince *me* with time."

"My real self!" she repeated with knitted brows. She saw her cue for future emergencies. "Which *is* my real self? I often wonder. It is all right to be simple and believing when there's nothing at stake, but in a big issue I'm afraid the idealist in me would go down before the practical—"

"What do you call a big issue?" he asked.

She held her breath for a moment. Then, "Marriage," she brought out.

"I don't believe it," he said with simple conviction. She could not trust herself to argue that. She bent to her painting, asked him in a minute for advice. "The eyes? They lack something. Dolly's are so beautiful."

They talked of Dolly occasionally. Dolly was to Roger but one of the exquisite details of the wonderful estate. He took her as he would have taken a statue on the terrace or one of the birds in the aviary.

"Dolly is so simple and pure and good," Charlotte sighed one day. "I am so the opposite."

This was following a night when Charlotte had showed herself a little more daring than usual at dinner, a little more hardly sophisticated.

Roger stopped painting and looked at her. "If you are determined to convince yourself of that, Charlotte, you are on the right track."

The words held a decided rebuke, but there was a certain pain in his eyes that softened the harshness of it.

Charlotte bent her head. "Oh if I *could* convince myself," she said in a low, passionate voice, "it would be much easier for me!"

It was upon Roger's vision now there flashed the image of the little studio, the image of Paddy. He found nothing to say; he could only turn back to his work with the old sense of an underlying tragedy which he did not understand.

It was perhaps this that made him unusually thoughtful and tender of Charlotte for the rest of the day. That night after dinner he suggested a walk to the bathing pavilion. The pavilion was a replica of a small Greek temple with pillared portico, a shining thing of mysterious loveliness as they wandered toward it in the moonlight. They seated themselves in the portico on a marble bench and looked out at the gleaming stretch of water, cut only by the definite white pillars that rose in front of them. Charlotte felt her senses pervaded by the soft

beauty of it all. She closed her eyes, and again there was that swift surge of tears about her heart.

The two sat there for an hour. Then Charlotte rose abruptly, and to his questioning pleaded fatigue.

"I must get to bed early," she said. "I have been feeling tired to-day." He was solicitous. He took her arm and slipped it through his; the palm of her hand rested on the palm of his; his fingers closed over hers quite simply and naturally. So they made their way back to the house, up the open slope, through the beech walk and the chestnut grove, through shrubbery and sunken gardens, all in the glow of the yellow moon. But Charlotte was conscious of nothing but the pressure of Roger's fingers on hers, the warmth of his arm so close to her beating heart. She drew away from him when they reached the lower terrace, said a hasty goodnight and fled into the house.

Roger was in love with her. The doubt that had quickened in her mind that last night in the mountains became now a swift certainty. He was in love with her. She knew it, if he did not. It was there in the deep light of his eyes, as they had rested on her to-night, in the light throbbing beneath the shadows.

Charlotte undressed tremulously and went to bed. There was a big square of moonlight on the floor; the draperies at the window swayed gently. Char-

lotte felt a strange transport of joy as she lay there. Whatever the future held of struggle and renunciation, for to-night at least she was content. She closed her eyes to the beat of her happiness, silent, steady, resistless—

At two o'clock there was a tap at her door. She started up, a little confused and frightened, as one awakened suddenly from a dream. It was Dolly, a slender trailing figure in the moonlight.

"Oh, Dolly!" Charlotte exclaimed.

Dolly came over and sat on the bed.

"Do you mind?" she asked as she turned on the night lamp.

Charlotte shaded her eyes quickly, but managed to bring out a fairly convincing "No, indeed!" Then, "What time is it?" she asked, still dazed.

"About two!" said Dolly. "I just came up."

Charlotte's eyes were still blinded; she was conscious of Dolly only as a blue satin-clad figure with a wealth of golden hair about her shoulders.

"I want to ask your advice," Dolly began calmly. "Philip proposed to-night."

"Oh!" Charlotte was fully roused now. So *that* was Philip's scheme. A hot anger swept her. Dolly, poor little Dolly!

"I did n't accept him," pursued Dolly. "I told him I could n't decide just yet."

Charlotte breathed a sigh of relief.

"I think you are wise to take time," she said.
"You are young, you know."

Dolly waived that.

"I had always thought I was in love with Philip," she said, "until just recently. But now I've decided it would be interesting to marry out of my own circle, marry *artistically*." She wound up on that last word with an ingenuous pride in its achievement.

A slow and painful comprehension crept into Charlotte's eyes.

"I'd thought of Roger," Dolly went on, coolly dispassionate again. "What do you think of that?"

The blood ebbed slowly from Charlotte's face and left it dead white, drained of all its vivid color and life. She looked suddenly old and drawn. Only her eyes were bright, feverishly bright.

"Does Roger—" she began, the words hardly articulated, but she repudiated that suspicion at once, even before Dolly answered without hesitation:

"Oh, no! You see I've only just thought of it. It would take time. But he would come round, of course. I could do so much for him. He has n't any money. I could make him."

A new Dolly, capable of amazing calculations! But Charlotte was too stunned to realize this. Again that image of Dolly with the scepter in her hand had risen to confront her.

"Of course," she murmured faintly.

Perhaps the peculiar quality of her suppression penetrated even Dolly's egotism.

"*You* were just flirting with him, were n't you?" Dolly asked, suddenly curious.

"We are very good friends," said Charlotte. "You see, we have our painting in common."

"But of course *you* ought to marry money," pursued Dolly.

"Quite true!" said Charlotte.

"You really should have taken Billy," Dolly went on, now in a tone of patronage. "But you know, Charlotte, Cassimir is keen about you. If you exerted yourself a little—"

Charlotte laughed uneasily.

"Suppose we get *you* settled first, Dolly," she interrupted. Tell me, are you in love with Roger?" Her voice was very gentle.

"Oh, madly!" said Dolly.

Charlotte smiled slightly, but with that echo across the years her irresolution dropped from her. The old tenderness came sweeping back, the desire to help, to protect Dolly. What had life ever given her, for all her money? What had she ever known of human affection? Philip or Roger! The incongruity of it! Philip, drunken, sullen, ugly; Roger of pure unsullied faith!

Dolly could *make* Roger; Charlotte had realized

that only too sharply as Dolly had stated it. could save him from contacts he was not fit^{reckless} to meet; Dolly could make it possible for him to ¹⁸ go low out, undisturbed, the higher vision of his genius.ⁱⁿ And she saw even more clearly what Roger could do for Dolly, poor little Dolly who had never known the happiness of any fine affection or understanding sympathy.

Charlotte saw it all in a quick flash of vivid illumination that faded on the instant, however, and left her confused and bewildered with a surge of passionate protest in her heart.

"I must think, Dolly," she said nervously. "I must think."

She ran her hand over Dolly's golden curls. Then, with a sharp vision of Roger's slender fingers entangled in that golden mesh, she drew away quickly.

"We will decide to-morrow, Dolly," she said. "You must leave me now; I am tired." She drew Dolly down and kissed her. Then she turned the night lamp out hurriedly.

Dolly sighed and rose. "But if it is to be Roger," she said, "you *will* help me? You know him so well."

"Yes," said Charlotte in a voice that seemed muffled by the darkness. "Yes."

“Of course
 Per^d Dolly
 pen^{col} to 235

PTER XIX

was to blunder in seeking to
 of others. She was actu-
 by a mistaken sense of doing good; she was up-
 held by a mistaken belief in the glory of self-sacrifice.
 Once she had herself in control, she was relentless of
 purpose, unscrupulous of method. It never occurred
 to her she was using her complete knowledge of
 Roger unfairly, that she was taking him at a disad-
 vantage. She saw only that he must marry Dolly;
 that end was her justification.

The house party had still ten days to run when
 she awakened to the task that lay before her. But
 she knew she could do little as yet, so bewildered and
 dazed did she feel. She must get through those ten
 days as best she could. She had promised Dolly to
 help her. She did, in that she let Roger alone and
 made it possible for Dolly to seek him out. She
 did, in that she threw her own lot in quite shame-
 lessly with Buchanan's crowd. But that was all
 she could do just yet. She must get off by herself—
 yes, get back to the little studio, and her own couch
 with the dirty pillows—before she could formulate a

definite scheme of action. Yet in that last reckless week she was to hit upon the method that was to prove the most efficacious in the end. She went in for cards and billiards indiscriminately; she played polo with Larry Wyckham and Tony Van Echt; she talked horses with Buchanan; she encouraged the Spanish attaché to sing French love-songs to her after dinner. But always it seemed to Roger as he watched her that she came back to Cassimir.

Charlotte's sudden deflection had left Roger hurt, uncertain, questioning. She pleaded that she was tired of her painting.

"I can paint in McDougal Street," she said lightly, "but I can't play polo."

Plausible enough, but Roger was not in the least deceived. There was some tragic urgency back of her sudden veer; of that he was dully sure.

Yes, it was most certainly Cassimir she came back to every time. Cassimir! Roger studied them intently when they were together. No, it could not be.

Then, one day as Roger and Dolly were sitting on the lower terrace, Charlotte and Cassimir came out on their way to the tennis-courts. Roger's eyes followed them reflectively.

"I do hope," sighed Dolly, her eyes taking the direction of his, "something comes of that. It would be so nice for Charlotte, and Paddy, too!"

Paddy! So that was it. The thing that had

seemed so perplexing before was only too simple of explanation now. All the doubts and questionings in Roger's mind clarified instantly to the painful conviction that Charlotte was about to sacrifice herself for her mother. The image of Paddy rose again to mock him. Paddy, dilapidated, crafty, sinister! It was wrong, all wrong; everything that was definite and sharp in Roger rose to decry the sin of it. Duty to self is the highest duty—the one decisive point on which Roger had fought clear of his Puritanic traditions. He wanted to talk to Charlotte; he wanted to argue with her. But he read her nature of a peculiar force that would not brook opposition. He became depressed and restless. He sought occasion to convey to her by indirection something of his disapproval, but she paid little heed to anything he said now.

Then one night at dinner his opportunity came. The talk had turned on the Bleecker divorce. Eleanor Bleecker adored her husband, but was divorcing him that he might marry another woman. Eleanor's action was acclaimed sentimentally as of an heroic unselfishness.

"Sacrifice is unfortunately almost out of date," some woman in a high treble voice had vouchsafed.

"Unfortunately?" Roger had turned on her quickly. It was his cue and he took it. Sacrifice was senseless. Only by developing our own powers

to the utmost can we help others. The highest duty is to ourselves.

Buchanan and Larry and Tony jumped in on Roger's side. Duty to oneself! They liked the sound of it; a nice name for all sorts of indulgence and excess. The argument waxed. The women were all for sacrifice; Roger accused them of being sentimental.

Then his eyes caught Charlotte's. She knew he was talking for her, but what did he know of her sacrifice? She was puzzled; then with a flash of her quick intuition she saw it all. He believed she was going to marry Cassimir for Paddy's sake. A strange glow came into her eyes, a glow of dull, smoldering resentment. She had wanted her act of renunciation to be an act of beauty and dignity. She had wanted her rôle to be an heroic one, but, by the light of Roger's mistaken belief, she saw her path only too clearly a path of petty artifice and cheap contrivance. To flirt with Cassimir, yes, it came down to that; Roger, himself all unknowing, had pointed the way.

Charlotte did not permit herself to be dragged into the argument. She gave Roger a strange, inscrutable look and then turned to Cassimir at her side.

The next day Roger pleaded a business summons and took his departure. Dolly, herself, drove him to the station.

"You will come back?" she asked.

Roger had given her a vague "Yes," then added, "If I should n't, just the knowledge that this beautiful place exists will be a comfort."

Dolly's blue eyes showed a frank disappointment.

"But you *must* come back. You *must* promise," she said with a hurt insistency.

He smiled at her, with a sense of her childish prettiness.

"Very well, I promise, then," he said, and the perception of how pleased she was lightened ever so slightly his own depression.

When Charlotte had said to herself that Roger must marry Dolly, she knew this premised the fact that he must believe himself in love with her. For Roger was too fine ever to be actuated by material motives. Charlotte's effacement of herself was the first step; that is, the effacement of all those qualities in her that had awakened such a quick response in him. They saw each other frequently. Roger had dropped in for a cup of tea a few days after she had returned from Laurence Park. She sought him out a week later in his own dreary studio. So it went. Occasionally they took walks together. They confined their talk for the most part to the practical, for it was the dragging problem of money they both were attempting to solve. "Economy would clip an angel's wings," sighed Charlotte, wearily. The pinch of need—they both felt it that winter. Only

in the parties that Dolly gave did they find themselves again in touch with the beautiful. The Laurences' town house was a sumptuous one. Fine pictures and pottery, priceless tapestries,—just to wander about among them restored the sense of humanity as a specialized product. Charlotte and Roger both expanded to the warmth of those little dinners, followed by a theater and a bite at Sherry's afterward. Bright spots in a humdrum world that was gradually resolving itself purely and simply into a struggle for bread and butter!

Then, at Charlotte's suggestion, Cassimir had been included. A new element entered in after that. To watch the working out of this little drama at close hand seemed to Roger the last torture in his already miserable existence. For things were going very badly with Roger. The mornings he had destined for his beloved painting were soon discovered as singularly profitless. He blamed it to the commercial work that lay in wait for him in the afternoon. He blamed it to the conditions under which he was forced to live. For the studio, as Paddy had predicted, was cold and he found himself reduced at an early hour to a shivering stupidity. But, whatever the cause, the salient fact remained: Roger could not work. This was the greater tragedy, for his was the genius that in the act of creation soars above the accident of circumstance. But once away from

actual accomplishment, he became the victim of a fearful depression, that left him miserable, moody, doubtful of himself, his power, his vision. His discouragement led to the loss of his advertising commissions. Failure to get the work in at the time agreed, lack of conviction in the execution of that work, told against him. Once or twice Charlotte came and helped him. She scolded him roundly for his laziness and depression.

"Why are you so unhappy?" she put it to him.

"Because I can't paint. I don't believe I shall ever paint anything worth while again."

She laughed at his pessimism, took him out for a walk, and all the while there hammered in her brain the thought: If Dolly could give him back his power to work—there, *there* lay the solution.

The winter had not been an easy one for Charlotte. She had been upheld by an almost fanatical zeal in her purpose. Not once did she question the rightness of the thing she had set out to do. But, somehow, the strain was beginning to tell. Roger, in the pathetic loss of faith in himself, was of a more potent appeal than ever he had been in his days of fine confidence. She could trust herself less and less to be with him. He was beginning to look too fine-drawn, nervous, almost ill. Charlotte, herself, was feeling far from well.

Roger refused soon to be included in Dolly's

parties. She was hurt, so he compromised and went there for tea occasionally. In a passive way he enjoyed Dolly, reacting to her guileless simplicity. And she was always lovely to look at!

Dolly came to Charlotte.

"It will take time, as I expected," she said calmly.

Charlotte could stand it no longer. It was not a question of time, but of issue forced, and forced at once. Dolly must give Roger back his power to work; *that* was the only solution. Dolly must take him away from the sordid drag of his surroundings, out into the splendid open where his inspiration might once more lift its wings. She could picture him again at his easel, as she had seen him so often in the mountains, his eyes luminous with the light of his inner vision. She could picture him so, with Dolly at his side, calmly waiting for the gratitude that was her just due. Gratitude and love! If there was a difference, Roger, in the glow of his recovered security, in the happiness of his quickened genius, would not know it.

In February Dolly had suggested a yachting party on the *Kittiwake* to the West Indies. Cassimir could n't go, for he'd just started in to study banking. But Larry Wyckham had promised and the Tim Watsons and—

Charlotte temporized with Dolly.

"I'll try to go. But I'm not sure. Make your plans just the same."

Then the next day, resolute and determined, she had gone to Roger's studio. It was a bitterly cold day. She found him huddled over his easel. He had his overcoat on and a blanket about his feet.

He rose eagerly to greet her.

"Let's take a walk and get warm," he said.

She shook her head.

"Where's your oil-stove?"

"The janitress took it this morning to fill; she has n't brought it back yet."

"Go and find it" Charlotte directed. "Then we'll have some tea."

The stove was duly recovered and lighted, the kettle put on to boil. Charlotte prepared the tea-tray. There was something pathetic in that array of old china, in the silver worn thin by generations of Canbys and Winthrops. Poor Roger! He sat there, warming his slender hands over the oil blaze and smiled at her as she busied herself.

Charlotte drew a deep breath, handed him his tea, and then sat down.

"You've heard from Dolly," she asked, "about the yachting party?"

"*Have I!*" his face brightened. "I've thought of nothing since. The idea of tropical vistas—"

"You're going, then," Charlotte said.

This brought him up short.

"Are n't you?" he asked quickly.

Charlotte put down her cup and saucer, hesitated a second, then looked him straight in the eyes.

"No Roger," she said firmly. "I'm not going."

His face clouded.

"Why not?" he asked uncertainly.

She read his thoughts.

"You know."

"Cassimir!" he said in a low voice.

Charlotte shrugged. "Cassimir or anybody else, for that matter, who has money."

She tried not to meet his eyes, for as she had spoken she was conscious of a strange ebb of her courage. And again that revolt at the pettiness of method by which she must achieve her end!

"So that is why I'm not going on the yachting party," she wound up a little feebly.

"But I want *you* to go just the same." She added this on a sudden impulse.

There was a silence. Charlotte looked up quickly at him, but Roger had turned away. When he turned back, she was conscious of a cold anger in his eyes.

"You mean you want me to marry Dolly for her money?" he asked in all directness.

She had blundered and realized it.

"No, Roger," she said, and the low quiver of her

voice carried its conviction, "I don't mean that. *I* could marry for money; *you* could n't. But I have hoped you might fall in love with Dolly. You could do much for Dolly, and Dolly could do much for you. She could give you a pure love, a simple devotion. A great passion, Roger, exacts too much; a great passion would hurt your work—It is the sort of thing Dolly can give that you need most—"

She put her hand to her eyes and rose. "I am getting altogether too officious," she said, "and sentimental too!" She forced herself to smile. "Ah, that miserable stove is smoking!"

She floundered about; she felt she could not go just yet. Roger stood there quite impassive. "Could n't I," she looked about her, "could n't I make you some fresh tea? Yours must be cold."

"That will be very nice," he said.

His voice was even. She dared at last to look into his eyes. The light in them had quite faded, blurred out by the shadows, through the blackness of which for one desperate second she struggled to penetrate. Then she had turned away.

It was, she told herself in all bitterness, that the Puritan in him had risen in resentment of her interference and had shut her out with a conscious cruelty.

The next day Dolly telephoned, calm and optimistic for all the fact her plans had gone astray. Roger had refused definitely to join the party.

"Some stupid old advertising work that had just come in," said Dolly. "So I've decided to give up my trip and stay in town."

Charlotte saw Roger but little after that. It was she who sought him out in a miserable sort of restlessness. He was polite, even cordial in his restrained way, but the sympathy of a complete understanding was gone.

He still went to Dolly's for tea.

"He'll come around soon," Dolly reported to Charlotte one day with an unusual eagerness for her. "I called for him yesterday to take him out in the country for a drive, and while I was upstairs the janitor told Parsons that Roger was back in his rent—"

Charlotte closed her eyes with the sense of a jarring discord.

Those weeks following Roger's definite exclusion of her from his inner life were for Charlotte the most miserable, tragic weeks. They were full of the sense of time and energy wasted. She could settle to nothing; she could accomplish nothing. And always she thought of Roger and of his contempt for her. Yet was it contempt? That doubt grew with time. Or was it that her appeal for Dolly had forced its way home and he had withdrawn into himself, frightened at the issue? For Roger was of a timidity that shrank from the particular re-

alization of the big events of life. But, whatever the cause, the fact of his exclusion of her was undeniable. The more reason she should persist in her struggle to help him, for the more defenseless he was in the completeness of his isolation.

The matter of rent seemed to Charlotte the last mortification, reduced as it had been to common gossip between Dolly and her chauffeur. It was, then, a well-timed opportunity that she should meet Buchanan Laurence the next day on Fifth Avenue. She was in her best suit and looked well. It was five o'clock; there was Buchanan and there was Sherry's. Tea under the conditions was inevitable.

Charlotte had taken her resolve at once, but with a complete realization of the cheapness of her attack. Buchanan himself gave her an early cue. Scarcely seated and the officious waiters settled with, Buchanan opened up the subject of Dolly's portrait.

"Oh!" Charlotte laughed, "that is to be my masterpiece. Give me time."

"It beats me," said Buchanan, "how you artists scorn money. It's lucky we don't run the banking business the way you run yours."

"I don't scorn money," Charlotte said. "You know that."

"I wish I did," answered Buchanan, promptly. "By the way, how's your painter friend, the good-

looking chap? You know I have half a suspicion, Charlotte—”

Charlotte laughed good-naturedly.

“You’re wrong,” she said. Then, in a lowered voice of mock seriousness, “Buchanan, I’m about to betray a secret—”

Buchanan’s delight was unbounded. He leaned closer.

“Fire away!” he exclaimed.

“I think,” Charlotte said, “Dolly is in love with my good-looking painter friend, as you call him.”

“Nonsense!” cried Buchanan. “There’s Phil.”

“She’s refused him,” Charlotte stated coolly.

“Sure?” Buchanan was skeptical.

Charlotte nodded.

“Gad, I’m sorry to hear it! And you think it’s this artist chap—Cotton Mather, is n’t it?”

Charlotte smiled broadly at this sally. “Roger Winthrop Canby,” she corrected.

Buchanan shook his head.

“I don’t fancy it!” he said. “A Puritan at my own fireside! Besides, Doll’s the sort needs some one to beat her into shape now and then. I myself am too indulgent.”

It was proof of this indulgence that Charlotte won Buchanan in short order to the giving of young love its chance.

"The first old Governor Winthrop was a smart chap, as I remember," said Buchanan. "He cornered a lot of land somewhere in Massachusetts. A real genius!"

"Roger is a genius, too!" said Charlotte, quietly. "Given the opportunity, he will do big things."

"Really?" said Buchanan. He was interested; success in any line compelled his respect.

"Lorenzo the Magnificent!" Charlotte smiled a warm bright smile directly into his eyes. "Why not, Buchanan? The rôle would suit you. How about a few pictures of Laurence Park or your Lenox place? It would give Roger a start and Dolly a chance."

"Done!" said Buchanan, loudly. Lorenzo the Magnificent! The idea tickled him. He expanded.

"You ask him, Charlotte, or I'll tell Doll. He can set his own price, of course!"

Charlotte thought a minute.

"No," she said. "Write him yourself, Buchanan, and make it of a strictly business turn."

Buchanan with a flourishing importance produced a note-book.

"Roger Winthrop Canby!" she dictated. "Washington Square South. Yes, that is enough."

Buchanan took her to her own door.

"Can't we ever get together, Charlotte?" he burst out. "Hang it all, I'd like to see a lot of you!"

How about motoring out for dinner some night?"

Charlotte smiled.

"I can't ever tell about Paddy," she temporized.

"But I'll call you up sometime."

"You mean it?" pressed Buchanan.

"Of course!" she said, then laughed. "Remember, Roger Winthrop Canby; *not* Cotton Mather!"

Buchanan could still appreciate his own joke with a loud guffaw. And so they parted.

Charlotte went in and made her way slowly up the stairs. Paddy's door was shut. Charlotte cast one weary, despairing look at it, then sank into a chair and sat staring dully into space.

CHAPTER XX

APRIL and May Roger spent at Laurence Park, July at Lenox. Charlotte heard of it from Dolly on her occasional visits to the city.

"He's quite mad about his pictures," Dolly reported. "Did you read the criticisms of the two exhibited at Knoedler's? It's fun to see the pictures grow; I sit and watch him every day."

The end of July the engagement was announced. The papers were very much excited, treated the matter from every possible orientation. Dolly's beauty and wealth, Roger's genius and ancestors! The affair was traced step by step. It was unusual; it was romantic. It was thought worthy of headlines usually reserved for murders and political exposures. There were interviews with Dolly, and interviews with Roger, none of them authentic, of course, but that mattered little; pictures, too, of the happy pair, pictures of the Laurences' country house, the Laurences' town house, even the old house in Concord where Roger had been born. The financial exploits of Buchanan mingled with anecdotes of the original John Winthrop. Even Nana, Dolly's old

nurse, was discovered as having a few things to say. As a tiny child, Dolly had *loved* picture-books. Truly, a poignant fact in the light of present events!

In August Charlotte contrived to take Paddy to a cheap little Jersey resort. She found the crowds intolerable, however, so the middle of the month they came back to the studio. Paddy was cross; she blamed Philip's failure entirely to Charlotte, so she did everything in her power to torment Charlotte in little ways.

The end of August Dolly telephoned Charlotte to meet her at Sherry's. The same Dolly, blue-eyed and cool!

"You're to be maid of honor," she announced.

Charlotte started to protest, but somehow her pride exacted that she go through with it.

"When is it to be, Dolly?" she asked.

"The fifteenth of September," answered Dolly.

"We're going off on the *Kittiwake* for our honeymoon."

Charlotte said nothing.

"Bendel's doing the dresses," Dolly chattered on.

"You're to go there to-morrow morning for a fitting." She paused a second. Then, "Of course, you know, Charlotte, I'll pay for yours. They're an expensive model."

It was evidence of the sterling quality of Charlotte's love for Dolly that she could meet this

with a quiet self-possession and a murmured acceptance.

The culmination of her plans brought Charlotte none of the joy she had expected, the peculiar satisfaction of a mission fulfilled. Whatever exaltation had sustained her in the beginning had faded completely long before her purpose had been achieved. She had suffered acutely in those last weeks. But now the struggle was over, an apathetic dullness set in and an unutterable physical weariness. It was this as much as anything that led her to put off her trip to Newport until the day before the wedding. She simply did not have the physical strength to meet the exactions of prolonged festivity. She wired Dolly she would take the midnight, arriving the morning of the wedding. Buchanan's answering wire, placing at her disposal the *Kittiwake*, which was leaving New York the same evening, filled her with a certain relief. The night on the sleeper would have left her in a sorry condition for the next day's gaiety. But once on board the yacht, the mistake of it all swept her, of overwhelming force.

The *Kittiwake* had just been done over, and, from its gleaming, shining whole down to the smallest detail of perfected luxury, cried out of to-morrow's occasion. The crew, usually so well ordered, were

all of a bustle. The captain, himself, had met her in the launch to welcome her on board. He remembered her when as a child she had taken trips with Dolly, a fact which insured him the privilege of a deferential familiarity. He talked of the wedding, always the wedding, and there was nothing for it but Charlotte must go over the whole boat when they were hardly under steam. Buchanan's suite, the biggest and finest, was destined for Roger. Yes, Dolly's room was just as she remembered it, only the blue-damask upholstery was new and her dressing-room had been enlarged. The guest-room adjoining had been turned into a breakfast-room, the one beyond that into a small lounge. The saloon was even more sumptuous than she had recalled it. They went below-stairs, too, to inspect the galley, the lockers, the wine-cellar, even the ice-plant. Good-natured groups were collected to gossip. All talked at once; the chef gesticulated. Jollity prevailed; the nuptial champagne had already begun to flow.

At eight o'clock Charlotte sat down to dinner, an elaborate function that dragged an interminable length. Then she went on deck. It was a beautiful night; Dolly had planned her honeymoon with an eye to lunar effects. The boat left a wake of luminous, tender light. Poor Charlotte! It was tragic; it was ironic; it was cruel. She sat there

in a passion of loneliness, a loneliness that was the sharper pain for a doubt fastening slowly on her shaken confidence.

In the evening paper the captain handed her there had been a chance item about Roger. He had arrived in Newport only that morning, after two weeks spent at an old farmhouse in the mountains, where he and his mother had been wont to go during her lifetime. A touching incident of filial tenderness,—so the journal interpreted it. But Charlotte read it otherwise and her confidence in the fine rightness of the thing she had achieved was suddenly shaken. As she sat there through the urgent hours, her doubt became a great fear, a panic of confusion. If Roger's love for her had been awakened at last! She closed her eyes to a pulsing terror that left her weak and frightened. The yacht was out in the open waters of the sound now; and always that tender light of the moon, the creak of the rigging, the cry of a wandering gull.

The next morning Charlotte went in early on the launch. A motor met her at the dock. There was a service wagon there, too, with some of Dolly's trunks and her two maids to unpack them. There were baskets of flowers and choice fruit and special wines and Dolly's Pomeranian, yelping and snapping at the passers-by. Irene welcomed Charlotte with open arms; in her babbling effusion Charlotte read

more evidence of the conviviality such occasions make possible.

A few minutes later she was at the house. She was ushered at once to Dolly's room, vaguely conscious of vistas of glittering display everywhere. Dolly's presents, of course! Detectives on guard looked at her curiously as she passed. Dolly was still in bed, a fragile, diminutive creature as she lay there, almost lost to view among piles of lacy pillows. As Charlotte came forward, her eyes swept with a swift pleasure the nice harmonies of that lovely room, but the sense of rest it should have evoked was lost in a babel of noise. There was a maid at the telephone, garrulous and shrill of voice, another directing some packing, a third arranging flowers in a tall vase by the fireside. Two footmen were carrying out a breakfast-table and there was the noise of running water from the bath. Dolly greeted Charlotte with a little whimper. She was flushed and complained that she had a headache. Nana was sitting on the side of the bed, scolding her roundly and preparing a headache powder.

Dolly drew Charlotte down beside her, and Nana rose to herd some of the maids into the dressing-room. There was a knock at the door. Another footman with a tray of telegrams which Dolly threw all over the floor in nervous irritation! Poor little

flustered Dolly! Charlotte took her hand and sought to quiet her; in doing so she succeeded in quieting her own nerves, too. Then Dolly began to brighten. Roger had come just the day before. Had Charlotte seen any of the others? But no, of course, no one would be up yet. The church looked beautiful; Uncle Henry had given her a dinner service of gold and Larry Wyckham had been drunk for three days.

At eleven o'clock preparations began in earnest, interrupted only by luncheon, which Charlotte and Dolly had together in Dolly's breakfast-room. A succession of manicures and hair-dressers and querulous maids! The gaiety downstairs increased apace and there was a running back and forth from room to room. A piano was being pounded somewhere; a strident voice was heard in an attempt to sing.

Dolly was dressed at last; so was Charlotte; so were the bridesmaids, who broke in ever and again with some absurdity of suggestion and flutter of conscious prettiness. Buchanan came in to have a look at Dolly, but showed a much livelier interest in her maid of honor. They all had a cocktail, which Charlotte drank, for Dolly was the toast. Six o'clock! It was getting late! They began to crowd down the big staircase into the hall below. The motors were heard outside. Buchanan and Cassimir

were shouting directions in loud voices. Then Charlotte caught her first glimpse of Roger. Other men in the party were taller than he, but there was that in his slender aloofness that made him stand out above the others with a fine distinctness. The effect was that of a pedestaled statue in a gallery of crowding tourists. He did not see Charlotte.

At last, amid gaiety and confusion they got to the church. Old Trinity! There was a hush as they stood ready in the vestibule; then the organ pealed out its joyous summons.

It was for Charlotte to lead that brilliant array up the aisle and she did it with a superb dignity and poise. She walked with head erect, her eyes on the face of the Christ in the window over the old altar. They crowded at the sides of the altar-rail, where Roger and Cassimir were waiting for them, the bridesmaids lovely in their shimmering gowns, the ushers tall and slim and straight. Dolly stepped forward, a luminous satin-clad figure with a halo of old lace and orange blossoms upon her golden hair. In her translucent blue eyes was a restored placidity, a gentle sweetness.

The music ceased, the flutter of the congregation subsided, and the minister began.

“Dearly beloved, we are gathered together here in the sight of God—”

There was in Charlotte's soul a strange hush that was yet vibrant to every word of that poignant service.

Roger's voice was very low, of a peculiar tremor.

"—to have and to hold from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death us do part—"

Charlotte's lips moved as she repeated the words after him; then she bent her head.

Roger and Dolly were pronounced man and wife, the minister gave his final exhortation, and the thing was done. There was a tense pause before the final burst of triumphal music. Roger had risen and turned to Dolly. Then his eyes met Charlotte's, his eyes the light in them at last burned clear of the shadows. There was a sharp sensory interchange, a second's vivid, tragic, terrible illumination, and he bent his head to Dolly's.

The next minute the procession, now gay and informal with responsibility at an end, started down the aisle to the exultant strains of the Mendelssohn wedding-march.

PART VI

PART VI

CHAPTER XXI

CHARLOTTE had contrived that they take a train from Naples that would reach Florence about noon. She put it on the grounds of the practical: she and Paddy had no definite place to go to; it would be folly to arrive at dawn. In reality, however, she was seeking to fortify herself against the poignancy of recollection. As they drew into the station she was deeply thankful her first day in Florence was to be a busy one, full of distracting problems.

The first problem presented itself immediately. What should she do with Paddy? Paddy could never stand the tedium of a hunt for accommodations. On the other hand, she did n't dare to leave Paddy in the station, for curiosity would have drawn her in no time out into the crowded streets to seek adventure. She compromised at last on the Loggia de Lanzi. Paddy could rest there, with yet enough pictures and statues and passing people to amuse her. So they got into a cab and started off. Santa Maria Novella, San Lorenzo, Palazza Riccardi, then the Duomo and the Campanile! They

were just the same, those buildings that she and Hendy had haunted so long ago. It was all just the same,—the blue of the heaven, the purple hills, and up there, back of the Boboli gardens, the villa of the comtesse still nestled among the cypress-trees. The people who pressed about them in the crowded streets were living the same bustling, noisy existence. Yes, the three years had effected little of change. The daily routine of Florence had been uninterrupted by event. But, as to that, her own life had flowed on, too! That was the strange part of it. Hendy had died, and Paddy had nearly died, and Roger and Dolly were married. Yet she had gone right on, and, outwardly, there had been little change. The continuity of life was as inexorable as death.

Her eyes rested on the Campanile, its slender shaft against the morning sky. Charlotte breathed a deep sigh. Yes, for all the sadness of recollection that Florence held, she was glad to be there once more.

She wondered vaguely what Paddy was thinking of. She turned to her. There was a far-away expression in Paddy's eyes as they came around to hers.

"It would have been such a priceless opportunity," Paddy said dreamily, "for *Boule de Suif* to know her Florence!"

It was the loss of *Boule de Suif* that had made Paddy as eager as Charlotte to leave New York for

good and seek their fortunes in Florence. When Charlotte arrived home after Dolly's wedding, she found Paddy in a woeful state of dejection. Boule de Suif had deserted. There followed a week of feverish search, of agitated excursions, but Paddy had known the real truth from the beginning.

"If she had died," Paddy wailed, "I should n't feel so bad, but for her to have deserted *me* for some old philandering tom-cat. Oh, I know; my instinct tells me. So don't try to argue with me or excuse that feline hussy."

So it was chance played into Charlotte's hands and Paddy saw nothing strange in their sudden move. The weeks of preparation were unreal, inchoate, as a disordered dream which defies all sense of time and continuity and perspective. Only the end Charlotte saw clearly; she must get away at once before Dolly and Roger returned. What she was afraid of she did not know; she had only the tragic sense of a great irremediable wrong that her presence would but aggravate. To get away at any cost! She went about with a wild recklessness, selling her furniture, her clothes, the few things left in storage, all at a loss, of course. She haunted the shipping-offices to find something within her means. Paddy was forever packing and unpacking, then repacking in a new way, creating a greater chaos with each fresh inspiration. In the end, Charlotte was forced

to sell some of Hendy's books to make up the sum of their tickets, third-class ones at that. The sacrifice of the books she considered at first very bitter, but in the end she got a certain sad satisfaction in the idea that it was Hendy who was helping her through this great crisis of her life. If Hendy had lived, things would have been so different. But she had a strange sense as they drove through the crowded streets of Florence that morning that she was coming home to Hendy. It was as if he were waiting for her somewhere, a welcome in the deep quiet of his eyes.

Their cab had reached Or San Michele now and the streets were getting more crowded and noisy. Charlotte roused herself again to look at Paddy. Paddy was sitting high, viewing the crowd with a lofty hauteur that would have done justice to Cleopatra drawn in triumph through the streets of Alexandria. Charlotte smiled to herself. A few minutes later they reached the Piazza della Signoria and Paddy was deposited with their baggage as anchor in the Loggia de Lanzi.

It was not until a month later that Paddy and Charlotte found themselves established permanently. They had progressed from one pension to another, a blood feud being established at each between Paddy and the landlady. Prices were high; money went at an alarming rate. Charlotte had in mind some two or three rooms, such as they had had in Mc-

Dougal Street, where they could do their own house-keeping. Exactly the sort of thing she was looking for could not be found for all her indefatigable efforts. Each day she demanded less, was willing to pay more. Paddy was all for a couple of rooms over some goldsmith's shop on the Ponte Vecchio. She thought it would be romantic to live on a bridge and she liked the pent roofs all covered with ground-sel. Then one day she had wandered up the Via Guicciardini, gay and festive with its bright-colored fruit shops. The matter was settled then and there as far as Paddy went. They must find a place on the Via Guicciardini. It was narrow, it was dirty, it was noisy; granted all that, but it was *vivid*! A happy inspiration, as it proved, for it was upon the Via Guicciardini that Charlotte encountered Francesca Salvati, and it was under Francesca's roof they were to find their haven. Francesca had been their second cook during the last two years of their stay in Florence. The meeting was a happy one, of voluble effusion on Francesca's part, of lengthy explanation on Charlotte's. They had lost all their money; they had lost *all* their money. Only by undue emphasis on this salient fact could Francesca be made to understand what Charlotte was after. Two rooms, *here*, in the Via Guicciardini! From Francesca's point of view, Charlotte had to admit, the thing *was* astounding.

With the discovery that Francesca herself now owned a house in which there were two rooms vacant, Charlotte's spirits rose. Her enthusiasm carried her down the street with Francesca to the house in question. She was glad for Paddy's sake that the fruit-shop underneath was as bright and vivid as any the block could boast. She was glad, too, for Paddy's sake, of the dark-eyed, queer little children that swarmed about the sidewalk and in the hall. Her enthusiasm carried her even up the three flights of crazy, dirty stairs, but when the rooms were disclosed she did give a little gasp of dismay. Her recent searches had prepared her somewhat, but not entirely. Francesca had said of the larger room, "She is warm and sunny." Well, she was, thanks to an afternoon exposure, but her good points ended there. Charlotte looked about. The walls were gray and scarred. A crude wooden table and some chairs, a rusty charcoal-stove, a couple of mattresses on the floor made up the sum total of the furnishings, held, Francesca explained, because the former tenant had failed to pay. It was, undeniably, a sordid little place. Still—Charlotte hesitated. It was cheap, for one thing, and her money was at a decided ebb. Then, too, she was at one with Paddy in her utter abhorrence of middle-class tradition, and the smug pretentiousness of boarding-house life was beginning to irk her horribly. She thought of their

present landlady; then she looked at Francesca. Francesca's dark eyes were full of a quick intelligence; full, too, of an honest sympathy as, in response to her question of Hendy, Charlotte had told her of his death. That was the turning-point. The bargain was struck; the furniture, excluding the mattresses, was purchased. Charlotte breathed a sigh of relief, but she could still have, as she took a last survey of the place, a sharp wonder as to whether this could ever be made, really, *home*.

But it *was* home very shortly with those distinctive marks of Charlotte's and Paddy's personalities to make it so. Charlotte's smocks and Paddy's dirty aprons were soon hanging on a couple of nails behind the door. The tea-things were on a shelf back of the stove, a strip of carpet on the floor. Charlotte's easels were scattered about, a few of her pictures on the walls. Paddy's work-basket with its tangle of spools, its broken scissors, and its thimble three sizes too big, managed to get itself tipped over once or twice a day, with the result that Paddy was continually groveling under something or behind something for something as to the identity of which she was usually rather vague. Still, just the presence of the work-basket helped. Then there were the beds, new beds. Some of the old sofa pillows had been, oddly enough, packed by mistake in Paddy's trunk. So these with the trusty steamer rug converted Char-

lotte's bed into a couch. The general effect of things was rather good, so they both decided, and they proceeded forthwith to settle down to life as it was lived in the Via Guicciardini. This, they were quick to discover, was of a different order from the life of McDougal Street. In New York Charlotte had known no one in her own house; even Paddy's knowledge of the other tenants had been a superficial one. A general distrust of one's neighbor prevailed. But here, in Francesca's house, they were all one big overgrown family, as incapable of meanness as they were of subtle reservation. One just lived—that was all there was to it—a community existence of open-minded kindness. As they all shared the one faucet in the house, so they shared one another's aches and pains and sorrows and joys. It had been Hendy's contention, always, that the lower-class Florentine was not the wary, suspicious fellow of tradition and Charlotte was to discover with the years that Hendy was right.

Hardly moved in that first day, Charlotte and Paddy were made to feel as one with the rest. It is possible Francesca had spread something of their story and the romantic that exists in all Italian bosoms had been stirred, with the result of a greater cordiality than usual. Mrs. Sardelli (the "Mrs." was Paddy's idea), ample, beaming, with a half-dozen little Sardellis peeping around her skirts, had

come up to offer for supper some fruit too ripe to save for the next day's sale. Mr. Sardelli had arrived later, after his rounds, a scissors-grinder on his back. His offer to sharpen for nothing any of their knives or scissors was an honest one. Antonio Integlia, a handsome swarthy youth, brought water upstairs to them, and Maria Cappacelli told them all about her sick baby and her husband, who was in jail. Francesca lent them things they had forgotten to buy and poor old Giacomo Amaruso offered to play for them on his violin when they got sad and homesick for America.

So it was Charlotte and Paddy were absorbed completely into the life of that little tenement house in the street of the fruit-venders. Before the first winter was over they had become essentially a part of the system. All the members of the household reacted in about the same way to the cold and the heat, the sunshine and the rain. They talked about the high price of food, the leak in the roof, the coming festival.

Charlotte's force of character had made itself felt from the very beginning, with the result that everybody grew to depend upon her. Her word was law; her decisions final. They were always a little bit afraid of her, although sure of her help. It was Charlotte who got out of bed in the middle of the night to heat water when Maria's baby had con-

vulsions. It was Charlotte who lent old Giacomo money to buy a new violin string. It was Charlotte who made short work of Anton when he was drunk, sent him to bed and curtly told him to stay there till he'd sobered up.

But, despite the recognition of Charlotte as a power, it was Paddy who was the prime favorite, for it was Paddy who was the prime mover in all festive occasions, of which there were many. Paddy's particular genius had a wide range in the Via Guicciardini.

Within the first week after their arrival Paddy and Charlotte had been bidden to the wedding-feast of the eldest Sardelli girl, Baptista. A gay occasion of music and Chianti and little cakes with caraway seeds in them, and melons. The guests sat about on the floor and amused one another with tricks or songs or told wild, impossible stories of medieval adventure. Everybody drank a little too much, with the result that at the end of the evening there were more performers than onlookers.

Paddy was enchanted. A rare people, these Florentines! From that time on her greatest ingenuity was exercised in thinking up occasions when she, too, might have a party. Thanksgiving—Christmas! But Charlotte drew the line at April Fool's and Arbor Day. Three parties a week the block averaged, in celebration of some saint or other,

so that in the end Paddy wearied of the gaiety. Charlotte occasionally looked in on one of the Sardelli gatherings, but that was all. These people interested her, but she had a feeling her presence dampened their hilarity.

It was not until the second year of their stay in Florence that Paddy really came into her own. The children of the neighborhood adored her and she always had four or five in train wherever she went.

"Why don't you teach them English?" Charlotte asked one day.

Paddy's enthusiasm was fired at once; her real mission in life was discovered.

Charlotte got her a blackboard and a quantity of chalk and the sessions began. Her "University Extension" as Paddy called it! A dozen to twenty tots collected at any hour of the morning or afternoon, coming and going at will. They all sat cross-legged on the floor while Paddy perched on a high stool in front of them. Such a frolic! Paddy drew pigs and donkeys and elephants on the blackboard and the children shouted out the names of them. She wrote words, which they read off in loud chorus. She told them stories of fairies and dragons and princesses. She moralized about good little boys and bad little boys. They counted by fives and tens and said the one table over till they were hoarse.

But the thing they all liked best was for Paddy to read them "Alice in Wonderland." She read it half in English and half in Italian and they all rocked back and forth and screamed with laughter. Not that they understood much of what was going on, but Paddy's mirth was their mirth, Paddy's hilarity theirs. They repeated the verses after her till they knew them by heart; they copied her dramatic rendering of them.

"You are old, Father William," the young man said,
 "And your hair has become very white;
 And yet you incessantly stand on your head—
 Do you think, at your age, it is right?"

This was usually the cue for several of the expert gymnasts to stand on their heads. Paddy encouraged this, believing in physical as well as mental development. There was nothing pedantic about Paddy.

"Turtle Soup" became such a popular ditty that Paddy used to save it for festival days and Sundays.

Beautiful Soup, so rich and green,
 Waiting in a hot tureen!

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Beau—ootiful Soo—oop!

Beau—ootiful Soo—oop!

Soo—oop of the e—e—evening,

Beautiful, beautiful Soup!"

This with the proper gustatory accompaniment was really a brilliant achievement.

Then the whole class was promoted and they went on to "Through the Looking-Glass."

"The time has come," the Walrus said,

"To talk of many things:

Of shoes—and ships—and sealing-wax—

Of cabbages—and kings—

And why the sea is boiling hot—

And whether pigs have wings."

On rainy days they played "Alice." That is, one was the *Mad Hatter* and another the *Dormouse*. Then there were *Bill* and the *Duchess* and the *Walrus*. The tiny tots were the oysters. When they got tired of that they sang songs. A jolly little class, surely! Charlotte gave them parties, when they had all the *spumoni* they could eat and were permitted to bring their cats and dogs. Such occasions were hectic, but, as Paddy said, they were "of a humanity."

Another reason for Paddy's popularity in the district was her prodigality of promise. She promised Giacomo a new violin, Anton new shoes. Each of the Sardelli girls that was married Paddy promised to equip with "linen and silver." The fact that her promises were never fulfilled made no difference in her friends' conception of her gener-

osity. Of an evening when the whole household collected on the sidewalk and sat about on empty fruit-boxes, it was Paddy's rapid fire comment on the passers-by that provoked the greatest mirth.

Perhaps Paddy's stanchest friend was Garibaldi, a monkey belonging to a hand-organ man next door. Baldy had singled Paddy out at once as a kindred spirit; the friendship that followed was a satisfying one. Paddy talked to him of *Boule de Suif*, the harsh lines of whose desertion had been softened by time. Paddy spoke of *Boule* now in the hushed tones usually reserved for the mention of the dead. With his head on one side and his little red hat in his hand, Baldy would sit and listen indefinitely with just the right degree of subdued deference.

Sunday afternoons Paddy, with her children at her heels, walked in the Cascine. They watched the games of pallone and the horses going to the races, Paddy expounding meanwhile on the evils of all betting. Then there were the *Mardi Gras* fêtes when Paddy and her brood rushed about from morning till night, marching and countermarching with the parade and screaming loudly at the clowns.

Yes, indeed, life as it was lived in the *Via Guicciardini* was full and rich of event, vivid, kaleidoscopic. Paddy was possessed of an infinite content.

Charlotte watched Paddy and, as time went on

and she was conscious of playing a smaller and smaller part in Paddy's life, a numb sort of resentment settled in her heart. She wanted Paddy to be happy; she wanted Paddy to be content. But she, herself, had wanted to be the direct cause of that happiness, that content. Only so, in filling a genuine need, could she work out her problem, could she make reparation for the tragic mistakes she had blundered into. The thought of her mission to Paddy had been the one thing to sustain her in those terrible weeks that followed Roger's wedding. But now, face to face with the stark fact that she was, after all, only incidental to Paddy's happiness, she could no longer find sanctuary from the bitterness of her remorse. She became the prey of a restless depression that found relief in nothing. She haunted the galleries and worked at her painting in a fitful, erratic way. She tired herself out with long walks and arduous climbs.

Very early that first autumn she had paid a visit to the comtesse's villa. As she climbed the path that wound between the drooping trees, she had never felt more lonely and desolate. The villa, itself, as she came upon it, confessed frankly its dilapidation. Picturesque it was, to be sure, but as Charlotte surveyed it she was conscious only of the waste and useless decay of it all. The comtesse had died suddenly in Monte Carlo, so the old caretaker told

her; the heirs had never seen the place and took no interest in it.

"I lived here once," Charlotte said, "for seven years."

The old man was kind and curious. He let Charlotte into the house. It was dark, the tall, narrow windows shuttered tightly, and there was dust filtered over everything. Charlotte went through every room, the echo of her footsteps, hollow and muffled, following her about. The house was exactly as Paddy and Hendy had left it the morning of their departure so many years ago. And upstairs in the big room that had been her studio, she came across a portfolio with some of her earliest charcoal sketches in it. They were smooched and dirty, but she recognized Hendy's firm touch in some of the corrections.

When she came downstairs she went out on the terrace. Perhaps there was something in her bright eyes and white restraint that told her story of tragic recollection, for the old caretaker was unduly kind, offering her the hospitality of the old place at any time.

"Do you mean it?" Charlotte asked in a husky voice. "Might I paint—here?" She indicated the parapet. Her eyes rested a moment on the valley below, the long sweep of the Arno. Then

she buried her face in her hands and burst into tears.

It was, then, for Charlotte to find in her old home her greatest refuge. She spent a part of each day there, often a whole day. When it was fine she painted on the terrace; when it was rainy, she huddled in the drawing-room, where the old caretaker made a fire for her and brought her fruit to eat. It was a refuge, yes, from the noisy streets and crowded galleries, but it is a question if the complete isolation, the dreary loneliness did not make her the easier prey to her apprehensions. Those first few years in Florence were full of the quality of a tense, tragic waiting, a ghastly expectancy. The image of Roger as his eyes met hers at the altar haunted her always and entangled hopelessly with that image was another of no less poignant significance, the image of Dolly as she had found her that night in her room, dressing to go away. Dolly, her face flushed, her voice shrill, weakly, pathetically the victim of the evening's toasts!

There had been letters from Dolly, two or three in the beginning, and some clippings about the new studio. Philip wrote occasionally, all about himself. He'd quarreled with Cassimir, had gone over to his Pittsburgh friend, Tony Welsh. Tony was a fine fellow and with his, Philip's, help, should get on in society. Yes, he'd try to remember to send Paddy papers, and some magazines.

It was through these papers and periodicals as they came at fitful intervals that Charlotte was able to follow the thread of Dolly's story. The simple chronicle it was, of tragic heritage and pathetic weakness. Poor little Dolly! She had begun bravely to work out her vision of Récamier triumphs. There had been many expensive affairs at the studio that first year. Roger's pictures became the reigning vogue. An ominous lull followed. Then with a sweep of tenderness Charlotte read of Dolly's baby born dead. She dashed off at once a note of impulsive tenderness. The answer came, telling of Dolly's subsequent illness. A querulous, complaining little note it was. The doctor had ordered her to Palm Beach and she didn't want to go at all. Buchanan had given her his town house and she was having it done over. A year later Dolly's second baby was born and lived just a week. Charlotte did not write this time. After that "Town Topics" took up the tale,—a miserable, sordid tale of surrendered weakness and indulgence. Ill health had broken down Dolly's last feeble resistance. There were a half-dozen names connected with hers those first few years. Larry Wyckham, Tony Van Echt. And there were hints of frequent sojourns at a fashionable sanatorium outside of Philadelphia.

Roger's name had long since ceased to be men-

tioned in the most casual art notices. There came the time when Charlotte could stand it no longer; when papers came from the States she destroyed them at once.

So four dragging years went by. Then one day in the crowded Piazza della Signoria, Charlotte came face to face with Cassimir, a young wife in train. The girl was one of the new type of *débutantes*, her short hair standing on end, her clothes to her knees, her face daubed with paint. She was like a grotesque doll with a fixed smile on its face. Charlotte could find nothing to say to her. But, despite the sudden pang of this, her first actual contact with the old life, Charlotte was genuinely glad to see Cassimir. He was exactly the same as the old Cassimir, who, she recalled with a smile, had proposed to her the night of Dolly's wedding. He had hundreds of things to tell her now. He would have looked her up before, but some one had told him she and Paddy were living on the Riviera. He had pictured her there in the midst of the winter's gaiety.

"You were cut out to be gay, Charlotte!" he laughed.

She shook her head and spoke of her devotion to her art. He discounted this. Then he went on to tell her the news. There were names that meant nothing to her; faces and incidents had blurred surprisingly with time. But she feigned a lively inter-

est in it all. The Tim Watsons were divorced and Mrs. Tim was going to marry Tony Van Echt. Billy Dunscomb! Ah, that brought her up short with a keen pang. Billy had been killed in an automobile accident six months before. Uncle Buchanan was n't at all well. "He 'll go off like this," pronounced Cass, with a snap of his fingers. "We Laurence men all do."

"Dolly?" Cassimer shook his head. "She's drinking, you know." The words were stark, but his tone showed his compassion. "Aunt Dolly went the same way," he continued. "Only, her mind was affected. That's what Uncle Buck's afraid of for Dolly. Roger's been a brick, but, after all, what can a man do? He's sticking it out, though. Puritan sense of duty, I suppose! No, he's given his painting up entirely—"

Charlotte got away at last. Cassimir was leaving at noon for Vallombrosa, so she was spared the necessity of seeing him again. With bent head she crossed the Ponte Vecchio, then, with dragging steps she made her way out to the Roman Gate and so on to the villa.

When she returned home late that afternoon, Paddy met her with the usual bright look and the remark "Back so soon?" Charlotte hesitated as to whether or not she should tell Paddy of her meeting

with Cass. But no, why should she? The outside world had long since ceased to exist for Paddy; the Via Guicciardini was her life. She had even failed to notice that letters from Philip no longer came.

It was soon after the meeting with Cassimir that Charlotte was confronted with the necessity of doing something to eke out her income. There were two possibilities,—to conduct tourist parties through the galleries or to take on pupils in painting. The latter course seemed the less irking in prospect. She was engaged to teach two little English children. The compensation was a small one, but her need made it impossible for her to dictate terms. She hated her work passionately. The blunt fingers and uninspired eyes of the children exasperated her beyond measure, but she toiled on and did not spare herself. Perhaps the most poignantly tragic thing those years in Florence held for Charlotte was the slow but steady increase in the allowance she was forced to give Paddy. The Doctor had warned her that Paddy's needs would increase and she had accepted it vaguely. But now she had reached the point where she could calculate almost to the day when Paddy would demand on one gay pretext or another a few more lire every month. It was as if Charlotte had her finger close-pressed on the pulse of Paddy's urgency.

However, Paddy was the same blithe spirit as of yore. Her reactions were about the same. There were the times when she shut herself in her room and Charlotte was obliged to send away the disconsolate children, the still more disconsolate Baldy, who was forever scratching at the door. But these lapses were no more frequent than they had been five years before. It was in Paddy's physical condition that the growth of the disorder was most cruelly manifest. There were days when Charlotte could tell to look at her how ill she was. Her color was ghastly and there was a dumb pain in her glazed eyes, but not once did a whimper escape her. There was the usual raillery, the quick comment. When her endurance was at an end, she would go to her own room, that was all. She began to have trouble with her teeth; they dropped out one by one. That, too, was a part of her disorder. She gave up her pilgrimages about the city and contented herself with sitting in the sun in front of the fruit-stand. The children tired her, although she never refused them. The stairs were an effort.

One day Charlotte found her in a faint outside the door. Weeping and frightened, she carried her into the room. Paddy's eyes were rolled up in her head and she was gasping for air. Charlotte threw open the windows and sprinkled water on her face. Then, with some confused idea of undressing her,

she loosened her waist and attempted to slip one arm from the sleeve. But at the sight of that poor sore arm Charlotte had staggered back in a sick dismay. She covered her face with her trembling hands and began to sob.

A second later Paddy's eyelids fluttered and she sat up with a jerk. She took the situation in at a glance.

"Did I *faint*?" she asked abruptly, and when Charlotte, kneeling tearfully by her side, admitted it, Paddy had shown the deepest disgust.

"Well," she said derisively, "to quote our friend Falstaff, I *am* a bunch of radish!"

However, it was not the weakening of Paddy's physical force that caused Charlotte her greatest suffering, but the gradual dulling of Paddy's brilliant mind, the blurring of her once keen intellect. Words slipped from her. She was uncertain of names and dates and figures; she confused her facts. Books, authors, composers—her range was as wide as ever, but details merged ludicrously. Once, when they were talking of William Morris, Paddy had recited in all fluency:

"The hound of heaven looked out onto the world beneath."

Poor Paddy!

In the spring of that fifth year in Florence Charlotte contracted some sort of malignant fever. Her

superb vigor had long since been forfeit to her recklessness. She fatigued herself with long walks; she exposed herself to every condition of weather; she paid no attention to her food. She was thinner; at times when her color ebbed she was almost gaunt. She disregarded her appearance entirely. There were days, weeks, when she did not look in the glass.

Her fever dragged through long weeks, for she lacked the force to resist its hold. All of the kind people of the neighborhood came and sat by her bedside and gossiped with Paddy. The children stood on tiptoe and looked at her with a curious awe, as if she had been dead.

The loss of her pupils, *that* was the big tragedy of the illness to Charlotte. What should she do now? What could she do now? She kept her purse under her pillow and gave Paddy a little money each day for their needs. The middle of June, when she had recovered sufficiently to drag herself up each day, she faced the stark fact that she had only about twenty lire to last her until the tenth of July, when she would receive her next quarterly. She had often thought with terror of just this emergency. Her pride would never suffer her to call on her friends. As to that, they were all living on a starvation wage, anyway.

Twenty lire! It did n't seem possible. Still, it

could be done. That dominating force within her that would not admit of obstacles asserted itself now. She felt suddenly stronger and better. Twenty lire! Pretty close calculation, but it *could* be done. It *must* be done. She took Paddy into consultation. Twenty lire! Paddy chuckled at the absurdity of it. But, as the thing in her mind took on the nature of a delightful underhanded conspiracy, she joined in with enthusiasm.

"Now mind, not even a crust to Baldy," Charlotte exhorted. "Then when the check comes we'll have a party—"

It was surprising how Paddy rose, this time, to the occasion. Put on her mettle, she showed herself capable of the shrewdest calculation. Each day she came home with the most remarkable assortment of eatables "picked up for a mere nothing." As the tenth approached they found to their satisfaction they would actually have two or three lire left over. "A good idea," said Charlotte. "The check might be late." Their fare was frugal, of course, but it was sufficient, and they were sustained further by visions of the coming party. This party had gradually taken on the definite form of just a little dinner for the two of them. Paddy's suggestion it was, and Charlotte was delighted. The conspiracy had brought Paddy closer to her than she had been for

a long time. Paddy liked to talk about the dinner.

"What shall we have?" she would ask ruminatively.

Charlotte would reflect, according to the formula established.

"Guinea-hen and artichokes," she would bring out at last.

"The sense faints picturing it," Paddy would murmur and roll her eyes ecstatically to heaven.

On the tenth Charlotte had gone for the mail to the discovery that her check was not there. Thank God for those extra lire! she thought. The eleventh passed, the twelfth. Charlotte began to get genuinely alarmed. Paddy, too, seemed to lose her head and paced the floor, throwing out random suggestions. The fifteenth found their exchequer quite empty. On the seventeenth Charlotte bought a few things at a neighboring store. She knew the man. "I don't happen to have the money with me," she said. "I'll bring it in Monday."

The eighteenth they lived on fruit from Sardelli's.

"I'll pay in the morning," Charlotte said casually.

She went upstairs to find Paddy, wild-eyed, fanning herself violently.

"It's getting on my nerves," she cried. "For Heaven's sake, cable C. O. D."

"But where?" Charlotte asked.

"Anywhere, stupid child!" she gasped. "You

can't be particular and finicky in an emergency, Cable Buck or Dolly or the President or Joe the ice-man."

Charlotte, however, would not admit she was beaten. When the morning of the next day brought forth nothing, she talked of the afternoon mail. After lunch, which consisted of some baked bananas, she set out for a long walk, her first since her illness. It looked like rain, but she did not care. Her footsteps turned in the direction of the villa. She walked briskly and by the time she had turned out of the Roman Gate her nervous apprehensions had all gone. She felt of a certainty the check would be waiting for her when she returned. She felt, too, for some inexplicable reason, free of the weight of her other problems. It was as if during the weeks of her illness, the intensity of her spiritual agony had worked to its own relief. As she turned into the gate of the villa, her thoughts were all of the future. Henceforth she would exert herself in earnest. She would get more pupils and make money so that never again would they know the pinch of need. She and Paddy would go to Vallombrosa occasionally and they would both have new coats.

The old caretaker saw her coming and came down to meet her. He had worried over her prolonged absence, was solicitous when she told him of her illness. He gave her fruit and some flowers. She

would have liked to linger on the terrace to watch the approaching storm. The Arno had turned from green to yellow and a brooding murk hung over the mountains. But the thought of the check and Paddy and the dinner drew her back to the city.

The letter was there at the post-office as she had expected. Just one of those miscarriages of foreign mail that occur so frequently!

"It's been in the post-office at Genoa for ten days," the man behind the window explained cheerfully.

It took but a short time for Charlotte to get her money at Cook's, to find the proper guinea-hen, the artichokes, the bottle of wine. Then, loaded down with her bundles, she burst joyously into the house. Just in time, too, for a dispute was being staged in the lower hall and there was obvious need of a referee. Francesca, with blazing eyes and arms akimbo, was bearing down on poor Antonio, who stood in sullen defiance with his back to the wall. A half-dozen neighbors were gathered about, arguing, protesting, gesticulating. Charlotte's entrance only served to aggravate the excitement, for they all started, each with his own flow of volubility, to tell her just what had happened. Francesca's pocket-book with ten lire in it had been stolen; the consensus of opinion was that Anton had stolen it. That was what it came down to in the end. It came

down, also, to the fact that there was n't a particle of evidence against Anton, that he had simply put in an appearance at the critical moment of Francesca's spring. Charlotte gave Anton his chance of fair denial. He took it in all solemnity. "By Jesus!" he wound up in deference to the nationality of his protector. It seemed convincing. Charlotte's suggestion of a stray thief from outside now diverted their wrath.

"I will take it up at the police-station, to-morrow," she said. There had been a number of smaller thefts in the house recently and she considered it time the matter should be investigated properly. She opened her pocket-book.

"How much was it, Francesca?" she asked.

In her new affluence she could afford to be generous. She gave Francesca the ten lire, and another for a bottle of wine. Anton and Francesca went off together. Then Charlotte started upstairs. As she passed Francesca's room, directly in front of her own, there came to her suddenly a swift sharp doubt that yet was a terrible conviction. Paddy! A hot anger swept her. She hurried to her own door and opened it. Paddy was lying on the couch, her eyes half closed. She heard Charlotte come in and tried valiantly to throw off the coma that was slowly stealing over her.

"Hey nonny, nonny!" she cried and managed to

get her feet free of the steamer rug. Then she struggled clumsily to a sitting-posture. As she did so, there dropped from her sagging pocket an empty purse. It was Francesca's. As her eyes met Charlotte's, her face twisted itself slowly into a malignant smile.

Ten minutes later Charlotte, weeping and sobbing, slammed the door and rushed out into the rain. Horror of the thing Paddy had done was confused with a certain wild regret at the bitterness of the scene between them. Paddy had been in her most flippant mood.

"But you know, Charley, our dear Lord, Himself—Yes, let's see; it was Barabbas. Barabbas was a robber—so why run lunatic about it? The incident is not without precedent. You can give Francesca back her dirty little purse, with an extra lira or two to shut her up."

It was this mocking bravado that had goaded Charlotte on to a blind fury that took into account nothing but the need to hurt.

"How can I do anything, how can I get anywhere, with you to steal and lie and drag me down?" So she had cried out in her violence,—bitter, passionate words that haunted her as she plunged on in the rain. And that second's sharp glint in Paddy's eyes before the old mockery closed in anew! Had her words reached Paddy? But what if they had?

She tried to tell herself she was justified; Paddy had done a low, criminal thing. But the wave of wild regret surged above her reason. Little choking sobs burst from her ever and again as she stumbled on.

It was a terrible night, windy and stormy. The Arno was swollen and washed with sullen roar against the Ponte Vecchio. Charlotte's umbrella wrestled with the wind; she kept tugging at it with unconscious resistance as she went on and on. She followed the river and then made her way through the blackness up to the Porta San Giorgio. As she turned out of the gate a more violent gust of wind swept from the open and, turning her umbrella inside out, wrenched it from her hands. She let it go. Then, lowering her head to buffet the storm unprotected, she went on. How many hours she walked she did not know. She knew only that at last she was in the little cemetery above the Porta San Miniato where, huddled on a grave-stone, she tried to think. The rain still came down in torrents. She was soaked to the skin and her teeth chattered, but she noticed nothing of her discomfort. Gradually her sobs became less violent, her tears quieter. The thought of Hendy had come to her and, as always, had softened her mood. She was able to think more clearly now. It was as if she were looking at it all

through Hendy's eyes, with Hendy's tender compassion of understanding. She was able to see the tragedy of fevered suffering these last weeks had held for Paddy. Paddy's drugs had given out. She understood it all now. And Paddy had had no money to buy more. As the thing unfolded itself so to Charlotte's vision, she could attach no blame to Paddy for her theft. Paddy was not responsible; the crime was Charlotte's for holding her so.

"How can I do anything, how can I get anywhere, with you to steal and lie and drag me down?"

Charlotte faced again with bitter repudiation those words, so unnecessary, but, above all, so untrue. For Charlotte came to see, as she sat there in the wet darkness, that Paddy existed for her exactly as she had existed in her childhood days,—absolute, supreme, the center of her universe, the force of her life. The evils into which Paddy's disorder had plunged her were yet incapable of tarnishing the dazzling brightness of that early image. Paddy, the perverse, wayward Paddy she had disciplined and watched over and scolded was the illusion that time had created.

Charlotte felt suddenly comforted. It was as if she had needed this final struggle to gain a clear vision, a vision that was to restore her faith and so give her courage to endure.

But if it was the image of Paddy supreme that lifted her so strangely to her new realm of content, it was the image of the erring Paddy she had tried to hurt that drew her at last in all tenderness back to the city. It was very late, but so detached had she and Paddy become from all consideration of time that she expected confidently Paddy would be waiting up for her with dinner on the table. Other scenes of this sort had ended so. She could see exactly how it would be. Paddy would greet her with some absurd bit of gossip and then they would sit down to the cheer of the guinea-hen and the artichokes and the bottle of wine. Charlotte smiled to herself at this point in her reflections and realized how hungry she was. She hurried down the hill, but her shoes, filled with water, retarded her. It was still raining hard, but her thoughts lifted her out of the dismal scene and carried her forward to the bright reconciliation that awaited her. Just before she reached the Porta San Giorgio a crazy black thing scuttled across her path, bringing her up short with a gasp of terror and a frightened cry. It clung to the hedge at the side, quivering and flapping like a huge bat. Charlotte's fear broke and she forced a laugh. Her lost umbrella! But her heart was beating fast. Another blast of wind and the crazy thing flew down the road ahead of her, seeming to provoke uncannily a chase. Economy asserted

itself. Charlotte ran after the black thing, caught it at last triumphantly, and then forced it back into shape with a sharp crack of its ribs. Then, holding it over her and tacking with the wind, she made her belated way back to the city and Paddy and her supper.

She entered the house with a sigh of relief. The door pulled from her hands and slammed against the wall. She forced it to with difficulty; the pressure of the wind was unbelievably strong. As she started upstairs, she realized how tired she was. Her feet dragged and she had to pull herself up by the bannisters. The other rooms were all in darkness, but a light showed under her own door. She put her hand on the knob eagerly, but of a sudden a strange unaccountable trembling seized her, an uncanny apprehension of disaster. She stood there for a second, dizzy with terror, the weight of the fearful stillness forcing the blood back to her heart. Then with an agonized certainty of tragedy she uttered a harsh cry and burst open the door.

Paddy was dead. She was lying there on the couch with that same satisfied little expression on her face as of one who has successfully put over something on somebody else. An empty bottle that had once held her morphine tablets told its story. Pinned to the dirty couch with a safety-pin was her last message, indicating the mood that had prompted

her in this her last perversity. In her inimitable scrawl she had written with a stubby pencil:

“Hey diddle diddle,
The cat and the fiddle,
The cow jumped over the moon!
The little dog laughed
To see such sport,
And the dish ran away with the spoon,
spoon, spoon,
And the dish ran away with the
spoon!”

To which she had appended as an afterthought:
“Forsooth, I *am* a bunch of radish!”

PART VII

PART VII

CHAPTER XXII

THE vision that had come to Charlotte on that stormy night, the vision that had carried her back to Paddy with eager confidence, was to prove of a sardonic irony, for it remained, during all the weeks of her agonized remorse, to haunt her with its intolerable message of what might have been. As the turbulence of her wild regret settled with time, the significance of the truth that had come to her too late became the more poignant and left her singularly afraid. Paddy had been the dynamic of her every action; Paddy had been the vital force of her life. The future terrified her; in its aching void there lurked strange formless fears. When the violence of her grief had spent itself, she became listless, apathetic. She did nothing, but sat dazed, like one in a trance. The drenching she had received the night of Paddy's death had again brought on the fever, a sort of malaria that came and went with fitful malignancy. But whether she stayed in bed or got up seemed to make little difference to her. All her activities were

mechanical. Only her sleeplessness troubled her, for it was in the drag of the cold night hours she felt the uneasy stir of that sickening fear. She must make an effort; she must occupy herself; she must see people. So she reasoned each night as she lay there, setting the next day as the beginning of her activities.

Everything was exactly as it had been the night of Paddy's death. The dirty aprons were still there on the nail behind the door; the important little work-basket, with the cover that would not shut down, was on the table. Intolerable residue of Paddy's personality! How completely Paddy's cheery blitheness had filled each crevice of her being Charlotte realized only when its light had been withdrawn and she was left, shivering and desolate, in the darkness.

The people in the house had been kind. They watched her and brought her little things to eat, a few flowers now and then; but Charlotte was to them essentially a controlling force, not a human being to excite pity, so eventually they had left her alone in her weary solitude. In time even Baldy ceased to come scratching at the door with plaintive whine.

Yes, she must make an effort. So she repeated it. She would rearrange the two little rooms, remove

Paddy's things, do some cleaning. Perhaps this would help her to a mental adjustment, a firmer grasp of facts. She 'd have Paddy's bed taken down and give it to Maria. Then she 'd move her own bed into the alcove. The big room she would use exclusively as a studio, when she began again to paint. But she knew her condition well enough to realize that she could never hold herself down to work. Very well, then, she 'd take lessons. This brought a bitter pang. She could afford things now Paddy was gone. Poor Paddy! And she had meant so to work for her in the future, to buy her a new coat and let her have all the money she wanted for her morphine. Yes, she must take lessons; only outside contact could save her from herself, her depression. Yet it was more than just contact she needed; it was the contact of sympathy. No one had ever known the real truth about Paddy's death. Death by accident! So it was dismissed. There are so many every day among the poor. If she had had some one to tell her story to, some one to meet her need with tender compassion, her grief would have been less bitter. But she had been so alone, so tragically alone, through it all. She had cabled Philip in charge of Tony's banker. Even a casual answer from Philip would have meant something, but the answer had not come. Yes, she was

alone, quite alone. Perhaps the fault lay in herself. She wondered. With Paddy it was so different; Paddy could never have been alone.

Paddy's funeral! Charlotte thought of that so often. It was, strange to say, a bright, vivid spot in her mind, and she quickened always to the recollection of it. A summer day of deep blue sky and balmy fragrance, the Via Guicciardini gay and astir! Paddy was dead. The news had spread. The older people wept but their tears had a glisten of excitement. Paddy was dead! Paddy was dead! The children told it to one another in the language Paddy had taught them. Their eyes were round and curious; there was something strange about this thing called death that came and took people away forever, that made them still and white and cold as Paddy was now. They tiptoed up to look at her with subdued awe, and Charlotte, shut in the little alcove room, was glad to hear their pattering steps and hushed voices. In the evening the older people gathered in Francesca's room. Charlotte knew the custom and had given Francesca money to buy wine for them all. The noise of the revelry as it came to her brought no sense of incongruity. She was glad of that, too! Only in doing things as Paddy would have had them done could she find her strength.

The morning of the funeral the whole street had gathered in holiday attire of blues and reds and

yellows. The children's faces were washed and they had their funny little hats on. There was a bustle of preparation, a hurrying back and forth. It was as gay and lively as the morning of the Mi-carême festivity. They crowded about, clambering over one another into the cabs that Charlotte had provided. There were so many to go that some of the men were obliged to trudge on foot behind. Giacomo and Anton and Mr. Sardelli and old Giuseppe, the hand-organ man, brought the coffin down. It was covered with flowers and branches of trees. But the children still held tightly to their flowers to put on the grave themselves. At the last minute Charlotte had taken Baldy, chattering and whimpering on the sidewalk, into the carriage with her. Then the procession started. It followed the embankment, turned and wound slowly up to the Porta San Giorgio. The same route Charlotte herself had followed in the rain only two days before! As they turned through the gate, Charlotte looked through the window, not at the hearse in front, but at the gala procession winding behind her. The other carriages were open, a bright blur of faces and colors, of flowers and green branches! Paddy's party! They reached the cemetery and clustered in artless groups about the open grave. An unorthodox priest, a friend of Anton's, had been found to conduct

the service. Leon, the old stone-cutter, perhaps the most devoted of Paddy's friends, had asked to fashion the stone. A small uncut slab it was, on which he had carved simply the word "Paddy." There were no dates, no facts. It was as if Paddy's spirit were of all time. So they stood about the grave, a bright vivid throng, and when the last bit of earth had been thrown in and packed down, the children swarmed forward eagerly with their flowers, which they piled about in gay confusion. The men had their hats off and the women smiled. Then old Giacomo played on his violin a Neopolitan dirge, that yet held in its minor wail all the sensuous beauty of the Neopolitan love-song. Yes, it was exactly as Paddy would have had it!

So Charlotte lived over and over in her mind the details of that summer morning. The one bright diversion in the days that followed one another in gray, dreary succession! The winter proved a cold one, during which Charlotte came to realize that in little things, too, she had been utterly dependent on Paddy. It had seemed to her during the years they spent in the Via Guicciardini that Paddy had been so absorbed in her own life she had completely forgotten her. But she came to realize in those bleak winter months how much Paddy had, in reality, ministered to her comfort. There had always been food, at irregular intervals to be sure, but still

food,—a bowl of hot soup when she felt her malaria coming on, a cup of hot tea when she returned from a walk in the rain. And the stove! The stove was always aglow, a bright, cheerful spot to come home to. But now the fire was out most of the time and she preferred to go to bed rather than exert herself to relight it. She was continually remembering in the middle of the night that she had had no supper, only to get up and find the bread-box empty. She could not go on that way, of course; she must set to work and systematize her life; so she kept telling herself. She would begin—to-morrow!

To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow,
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day—

One of Paddy's favorite bits that she had used and misused at random! The thing echoed in Charlotte's mind continually. To-morrow! The vague, formless terror of it! And always she was so weary from the lack of sleep, so weak from her chills and fever.

The winter passed and spring came. Paddy had been dead almost a year. With that thought Charlotte had forced a last decision. Her weakness of resolution was beginning to frighten her; she had a desperate sense that she must do something to pull herself up short in her treacherous insecurity. Paddy's anniversary offered itself as a definite issue.

That day, Charlotte told herself, must mark the beginning of her new life. It would be her tribute to Paddy, her way of making Paddy's anniversary bright and distinctive. The idea proved a happy one, of almost immediate tonic effect. Charlotte's spirits began to rise, a little of her old energy came back. As the day approached she became almost eager. She began to eat regularly; she went up to the villa and talked to the old caretaker. She bought herself some expensive paints.

The 'day before, she had risen early and called Maria to her. Together they had taken down Paddy's bed and with Anton's assistance carried it to Maria's room. Maria was voluble in her gratitude; in the end there was nothing for it but to let her come back and help with the cleaning. Perhaps it was as well, after all. Charlotte took Paddy's aprons from their nail and folded them carefully. She collected Paddy's clothes, scattered here and there. A dingy black skirt, a torn waist, the old black shawl,—Charlotte put them away tenderly in a drawer. The sewing-basket, too, she removed. She and Maria worked all day. Even Maria was horrified at the dirt that had collected. They cleaned the windows and scrubbed the floor. The dishes were washed, the pans cleaned, the stove polished. The room without the couch seemed larger and lighter. Yes, she ought to be able to

paint there with comfort. She had gone to bed in the little alcove room that night and for the first time in weeks she got a little quiet sleep.

The next morning dawned, bright and vivid. Charlotte had set the evening as the time of her visit to the cemetery. She wanted to be there by Paddy's grave as the sun set over Florence. The day held for her two tasks that, with the force of her new energy, she faced deliberately. The first was to sort her pictures. There were dozens of them, all unfinished, mute reproaches of the past. In those strange faces struggling out of the blank of incompleteness she could trace her own moods. These fragmentary bits of her former self carried the same poignant message of unsustained effort, of unachieved ambition, of forgotten illusion, as did the faded frescoes and darkened marbles of Florence. She came upon Dolly's picture at the very last. She had almost forgotten that, too! She looked at it with tender compassion, and her thoughts swept back to that sunlit grove in Laurence Park. Dolly and Roger! Yet she was conscious as she thought of them that the year had wrought in her attitude toward them a subtle change. The sympathy was there, the tenderness, but it was as if she were looking on at a drama in the passion and tragedy of which she herself was in no way involved. She was thankful for this; only in detachment from the past could

she hope to work out her future. She looked at the picture for a long time. And as she studied it—the translucent blue eyes, the delicate features, the golden hair—it was as if Dolly stood before her with parted lips, waiting for the touch that would quicken her to life. A beautiful picture! A few more strokes and, Charlotte realized with tremulous joy, she would have created a *great* picture. She put it on her easel and looked at it raptly. Tomorrow Dolly would live and she herself would have found her strength.

Her mood of exaltation carried her through the morning. But in the afternoon, confronted by her second task, she felt the old restless depression again. She intended to go through Paddy's trunk and then put it away somewhere out of sight. She dragged it into the big room, a trunk that, like Paddy, had seen better days. The corners were all worn, the clamps broken, the straps fortified with dirty knotted pieces of rope; but, for all its dilapidation, it stood confessed, a trunk of the best traditions of the Rue de la Paix. It was completely covered with bright, gay labels that opened up brilliant vistas of the world of moneyed travel. Charlotte sat there and made out the names, one by one. Assouan, Khar-toum, Bagdad, Corfu—, places Paddy had known so well; vivid, throbbing places; places she herself had once so confidently expected to know, too! She

felt suddenly shut in, circumscribed by event. Her optimism of the morning had quite gone now and she sat there the prey of a bitter discontent as her mind followed the brilliant pageantry evoked by those tattered pieces of paper pasted on that worn old trunk. At last she roused herself. And Paddy, shoddy little Paddy, had been the central conspicuous figure of that kaleidoscopic world!

She opened the trunk at last with a sigh. Paddy had not unpacked it since they arrived; it was a question if she had ever unpacked it since the day she had left Newport. Things had been pulled out at intervals, of course, to the reckless tumbling of what was left behind. A medley of articles, certainly, as they were disclosed to Charlotte's view—bills of thirty years back, invitations, old yellow newspapers, a big package of sheets and linen, just as it had come back from the laundry the day they left New York, two more of the old dirty sofa-pillows, a variety of old clothes. There was little of significance. Only in the bottom of the trunk was a very fine filet luncheon-cloth. Then there was a suit box. Charlotte opened this. In it was folded away in tissue paper a beautiful mauve chiffon dress, a dress Charlotte had never seen before. She unfolded it gently. A fragile, gossamer thing, yet it had endured through the years to bring her now the wonder of its fragrant memories. The

tears came to her eyes and she found herself weeping softly. At last in all tenderness she folded the dress back in its box and shut it away.

Next she came to two pictures, one a painting of Florence and its cypress-trees. It was the view one gets on the way to Settignano around the shoulder of Monte Ceceri. An exquisite sketch of wistful suggestion, the only piece of Hendy's work Charlotte was ever to see. The other picture was a photograph of Paddy and Hendy, with a date on the back some thirty years before. A tragic little picture, so Charlotte thought, viewed through the gathering mist of years! Tragic because of the very confidence in the eyes of those two as they now met hers in smiling amusement. Tall, erect, Hendy stood there, with all the supple vigor of youth in his easy attitude. And Paddy, Paddy was so young, too, even younger than Charlotte remembered her way back in the beginning of her memory. Alert, bright-eyed, she stood there and smiled, a chic little French hat on her head, her billowy dress caught in a passing breeze, an absurd little parasol in her hand. There was something gay and confident in that picture, as if the happiness of those two was so strong it could never pass away. Charlotte put it aside; she could see it no longer, for her eyes were wet with tears.

The rest of the trunk held only debris. No, there

was one package in the bottom she nearly overlooked, a package done up in cotton and corrugated board. As she started to open it her fingers began to tremble and her eyes showed a strange fear. She knew what she was going to find. A bottle of morphine tablets, a bottle of tincture! She had dropped them into her lap with a quick recoil; then with a quicker protest she burst into passionate weeping. Paddy had hidden those things away long ago, and, when the emergency she intended to forestall came, she had forgotten them. Poor secretive, careless Paddy! Had she only remembered, the theft with its fatal consequences might never have been, the bitter words that had caused her death would never have been uttered. It was the tragic uselessness of it all that mocking ironical find now forced home to Charlotte. The old passion of grief had swept back upon her, the old agony of loneliness, with its stir of sickening fear. The day that had dawned so bright of hope was fading to a tragic close.

Yet the sunset, as she watched it that night, sitting by Paddy's grave, had never seemed more beautiful. Florence lay below her, set in the hollow of the hills, yellow, mystic Florence. The mountains against the sky-line were a deep indigo, their purple shadows almost black. The sun drew to its own warmth the colors of the earth, leaving it dim and hushed. The drenched gray of the olive trees, the somber purple

of the Judas, the mauve of the wistaria became all a part of the heaven's glow and the shadows of night rested where once their vividness had been. Only the cypress-trees remained—definite, brooding, unyielding—and whispered defiance of the darkness.

Paddy! To-night for the first time Charlotte found no comfort in sitting by Paddy's grave. It was as if Paddy were no longer there, as if her spirit had flitted gaily on to some bright realm of new adventure.

So it was, weeping in that newer poignancy of her loneliness, that Roger was to find her. His coming had in it a certain passionate necessity. Buchanan's fears for Dolly had been realized and Roger felt himself no longer needed. He was on his way to Ceylon and, hearing in Paris of Paddy's death, he had come to ask Charlotte to go with him. It came down to that in the essence, but, in reality, it was the cry of his wounded faith seeking to be raised up again. Only in each other could they justify the waste of the years; only in each other could they make of life the fine, splendid thing it was meant to be. Love was life; love was law; love was God. So Roger cried it out with passionate conviction as they clung together in the darkness. There had been no formality of greeting, no hesitancy of conscious restraint. That first intense relief of discovery had carried them quite simply into each

other's arms. Roger held her to him, kissing her hair, her eyes, her mouth, and there seemed nothing strange in it, only a certain sad urgency. Love is life. And for one little moment the intensity of Roger's plea swept Charlotte on to the vision of a glorious surrender. But that within her that knew the right was still inexorable and she had turned at last, weeping, from his kisses. Roger was Dolly's.

"I cannot! I cannot!" she cried bitterly.

So they fought it out in the darkness and in the long struggle Charlotte found her strength, a strength sufficient to carry its splendid message of a complete justice straight to Roger's heart. Life was not love; life was law. In the purity of her belief, in the fine quality of her larger unselfishness, Roger was to find the answer to his need. In that moment of renunciation as she stood there before him, Charlotte was to Roger more than just the woman he loved; she was a beautiful vision to stay with him always, to work the renewal of his faith, and so to help him on to high achievement. Charlotte read her victory in the strange softened light that crept into Roger's eyes, a light reflected in her own. A mood of exaltation held them both for a little moment, then they fell apart with a sigh.

The moon had begun to rise now, its wan radiance over everything. It lighted up the little cemetery, the shadowed graves, the tall white stones. Char-

lotte drew Roger down by her side on the crude little bench where she had sat so often in her loneliness, and she began to talk of Paddy. She told him the whole wretched, sordid story of Paddy's death and, as she wept softly, he held her to him and kissed her. Then in a low voice he talked of Dolly and he too, seemed to find a strange relief as he talked,

"In her queer little way," he said, "Dolly grew to care for me after we were married. And if I had only cared for Dolly I might have saved her. I had a feeling through it all that if things had been different, if *you* had been Dolly, I could have saved you."

Charlotte's heart gave a strange throb.

"Yes," Roger continued, "I could have saved *you*."

He mused a minute sadly.

"Poor little Dolly!" he said. "She would cry and promise, but in the end she guessed the truth, and after that I could do nothing with her. When the first baby was born and I told her it was dead, she cried and turned away. 'If it had been Charlotte's baby,' she said, 'it would have lived.'"

So they talked on and on, but as it grew late a weariness crept into their voices. The struggle they had been through was beginning to tell. Charlotte rose at last. Then with a sharp consciousness

of tragic finality, all her confidence deserted her. As her eyes rested on Paddy's grave, that still mocked her with its emptiness, the old terror of the future, forgotten in her high moment of sacrifice, came surging back, of overwhelming power. She broke into a passionate weeping and clung to Roger in a helpless despair. Her quivering lips sought his again and again as if seeking in their warmth a sanctuary from her fear. Roger kissed her tenderly, sadly but with a generosity born of his new insight he did not force the vantage of her sudden weakness. The courage of her splendid conviction was now his.

As they walked back to the city, her arm drawn through his, they talked of many things. She dwelt on his painting and the stir of the old eagerness was in his voice as he answered her. He would do great things for her sake and she was glad, glad that it was so. But there was still a faint bitterness in her heart, for she recalled those days in the mountains when she had inspired Roger to paint and then had sat by, restless and forgotten—

As they crossed the Ponte Vecchio Charlotte began to talk of her early life in Florence. She spoke of Hendy in all tenderness. "He was my father," she said simply. "If he had lived, things would have been so different." As they passed the Duomo she spoke of her childish experience. "Life has been

like that with me," she said. "I had expected it to be so bright and vivid."

Only once was there mention of her own future.

"How did you find me?" she asked.

"I got your address from Philip, in Paris."

"No, but here," she pressed.

"It was quite simple," Roger answered. "Once I found the Via Guicciardini, there were a dozen people to direct me to the cemetery."

Charlotte smiled at that. "I shall always live in the Via Guicciardini," she said quietly. "It was Paddy's choice; it was Paddy's life."

She went on then to speak of Paddy's children.

So they talked. Their words were casual, but their voices were subdued and tense. Yet as they walked on through the silent moonlit streets, the strain of their taut emotions lessened gradually and there came to them both a strange illusion, as if they would always go on just so. Fantastic, unreal it was, yet so completely did it hold them in its spell that the actual parting, when it came, seemed the illusion. As they stepped into the lighted station they turned and looked at each other. She was conscious of how thin he was; he was aware only of her brilliant, tragic eyes. She put her hand in his. He held it a second; then, stooping, he placed on her lips a kiss, light, whimsical as that other one so long ago, the memory of which held them both as they

smiled into each other's eyes and said good-by. Six tragic, crowded years were bridged by that light kiss that was, now as it had been then, all a part of their mood, a part of their illusion, a part of the future that flickered fitfully as a firefly and drew them on to follow, wistful and wondering.

But Charlotte's fantastic mood held only for a little after she found herself alone. As she walked back through the hushed streets, the old despair was asurge in her heart. Her head throbbed and she recognized vaguely that numb ache in the very marrow of her bones that came as inevitable warning of her fever. Another siege! She closed her eyes to it. It seemed more than she could bear. Once home and in bed, she gave herself up completely to her misery that was all a dull physical suffering and a harsh resentment of her lot. The warm memory of Roger's presence made her loneliness the more tragic. As the hours of the night dragged on, her thoughts seethed the more furiously with the fever in her blood. If she could only sleep! If she could only sleep! So she cried as she pressed her throbbing temples and tried to keep her eyelids closed. But they fluttered open always to the blackness that was yet not the blackness but a formless, haunting dread. Her resentment grew with her pain and terror. In giving Roger of her strength she had drained her own. Roger would paint; yes,

Roger would go on and paint. So she kept telling herself over and over and the thought was a bitter one. She had sent him away because she believed it right and now she was left alone in her weakness. All her splendid confidence, her fine faith had perished. She had believed in right; she had believed in law; she had believed in God. And what had her fine beliefs, her unquestioning allegiance, done for her? If there was a God, he was a blundering one, a malicious one, a Setebos to create and torment. Yet she knew, of a desperate certainty, she could never end it all as Paddy had done, for her maimed belief still cried out against that supreme defiance.

Yes, whatever ignoble compromise she must make with life, she must live on. That was the sardonic, illogical penalty of her faith. She must live on, and alone. Alone, as she was now alone, in the darkness of that little alcove room, a darkness full of a dread haunting urgency, Paddy's urgency, her *own* urgency. She knew it now. The veiled terror that had been walking beside her so long had taken at last its tragic, definite shape. She knew now what she wanted. Those two bottles, out there on the table, were like grim specters in the grayness of the dawn, the dawn that was to have marked the beginning of her new life! She rose at last, shivering, weeping, moaning. A glass gave back her image in the

dim light and wrung from her a sharper anguish. She looked haggard and old as she stood there in one of Paddy's faded flannel nightgowns. And as, that night at the villa, her own brilliant image had faded to Paddy's, so now the blurred eyes that looked back at her became suddenly Paddy's eyes, with the dumb pain of her craving in their depths. With a quick gesture Charlotte seized the bottle of tablets. But she was still capable of a last recoil, and as her fingers closed on the bottle she threw it from her. It struck the stove and with a shivering sound shattered into bits. The pellets scattered and settled about, little white deadly spots on the dark rug. Two of them lay at Charlotte's feet; she stared at these wide-eyed. Then, stooping swiftly, she swept them into her hand and raised it, trembling, to her mouth. She had swallowed them. She stood quite still a minute. Then, with a harsh cry, she rushed into the little alcove room, and, throwing herself on the bed, she buried her face in the dirty pillows.

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